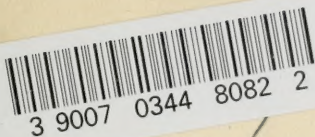


THE END OF
THE FLIGHT
BURTON KLINE

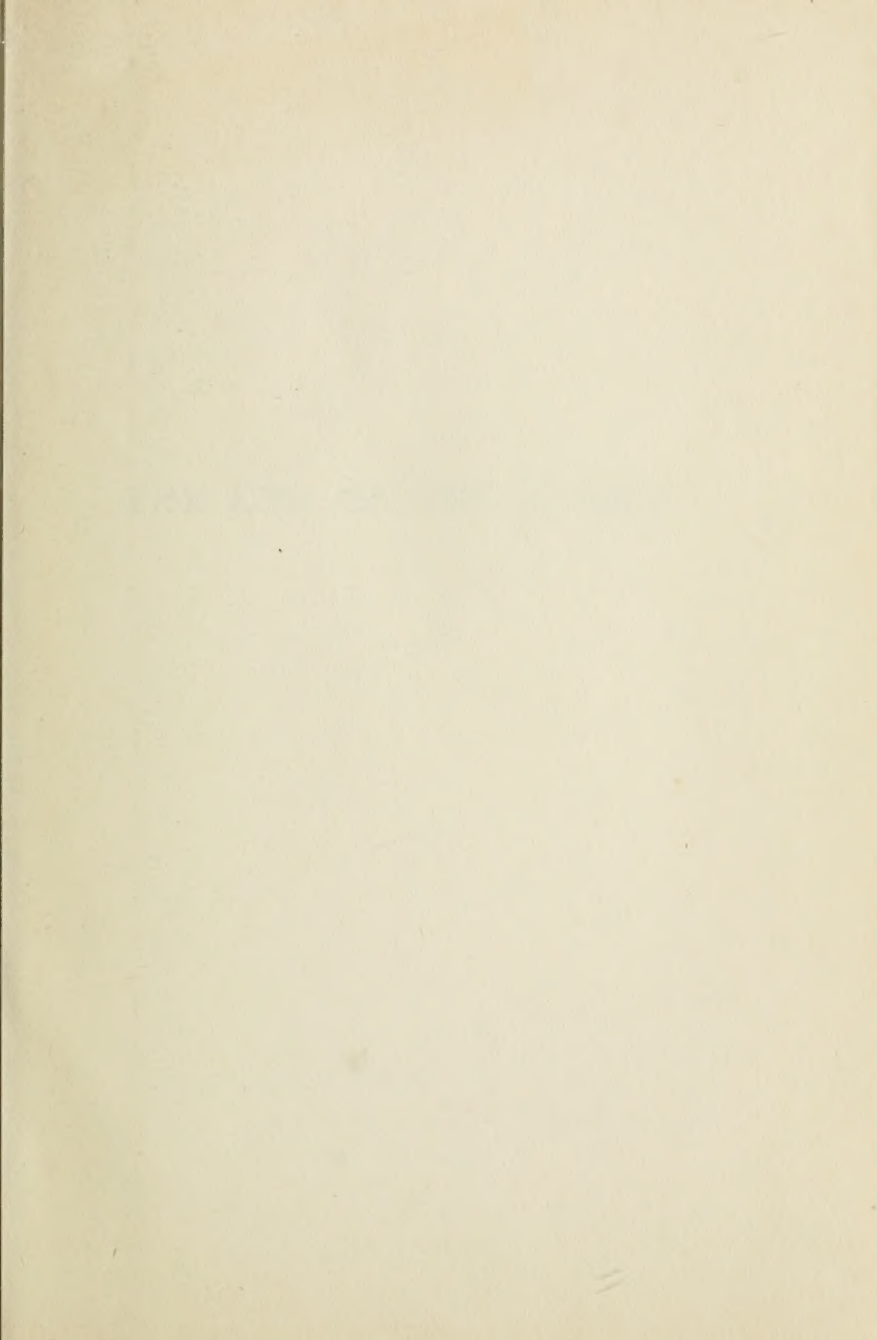


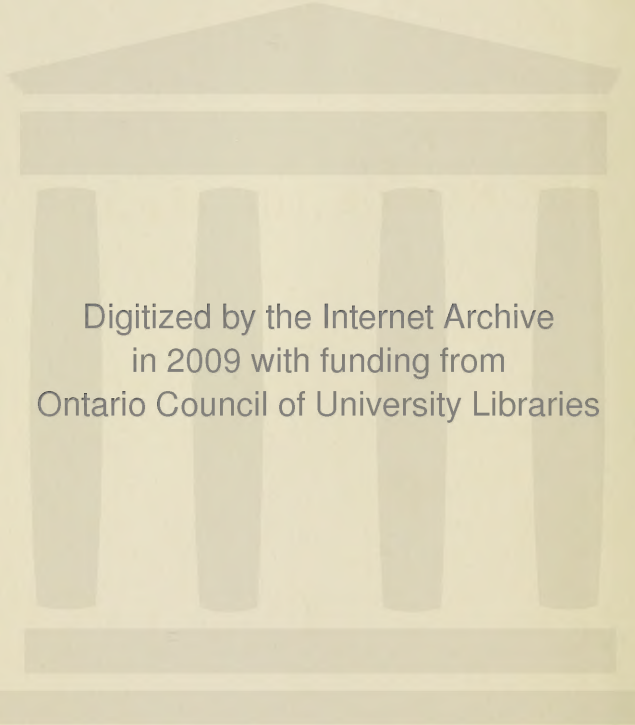


THE LIBRARY OF
YORK
UNIVERSITY



Lean





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
Ontario Council of University Libraries

THE END OF THE FLIGHT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

STRUCK BY LIGHTNING:
THE COMEDY OF BEING A MAN

The story of a violent love affair played by a prominent man before the chilly stares of a prudish people.

"A well constructed, plausible narrative, cleverly written, and extremely amusing."—*Boston Advertiser*.

NEW YORK: John Lane Company
LONDON: John Lane, The Bodley Head

THE END OF THE FLIGHT

BY

BURTON KLINE

AUTHOR OF "STRUCK BY LIGHTNING: A COMEDY," ETC.

NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
MCMXVII

PS
3521
L577
E5

COPYRIGHT, 1917
BY JOHN LANE COMPANY

THE PLIMPTON PRESS
NORWOOD, MASS., U.S.A.

TO MY FRIEND

J. P. COLLINS

BECAUSE I OWE HIM GREATLY, AND
LIKE HIM MORE



BOOK ONE

The End of the Flight

CHAPTER I

SHE was one of the causeless catastrophes. Even she herself could offer no apology for being. She happened. She was. That is all.

Anywhere else her career might have run its course as well, or even more successfully. That such a woman and such a career fell where they did is one of the ironies, too.

As ironical as a prison in the sunlight.

You would smile at the thought of fiery human passions breaking out upon a scene of such utter serenity. There lies the miniature metropolis, in a great bowl of greenery three miles wide and perhaps nine long. One of its rims is fashioned of the last tired lifts of a continental chain of mountains. The other rim is scalloped by a tier of lower hills, laid out like a grandstand before the spectacle of this sunken garden with a city in the middle. Three hundred miles away the sea calls vainly to the waters of the river, that sleep in this bowl as if resolved never to leave it after their wild sports in the wooded country to the west. Eastward the bowl and the river open into a wider, an even lovelier valley, that still patiently waits to commit its nooks to a Corot, its sweep of line to a Turner. And the Springs and Autumns of that vale would have satisfied even Vergil.

So, with these and other valid excuses, the little toy metropolis, as you see it of an Autumn afternoon from the tip of one of its hills, is entitled to its large and amusing conceits. Over its head are hoisted ten thousand parasols of elm and maple. Ten thousand little gardens quilt its "suburbs," and beckon you down from your hill for a pipe of peace among their verbenas and sweet peas. The rattle from the streets, the whine of electric cars, the hum of motors, the whistles of the locomotives, the droning of the mills, come faintly up to your height, and you laugh and exult over this emporium in miniature, this marvellous little toy of a town, perfected even to these astounding details.

And that it should be alive! The streets are teeming with trucks and cars; shoppers and strollers weave through each other's movements on the sidewalks. On the almost moveless mirror that the river has fixed between the two halves of the town, like a perpetual invitation to virtue, you may mark the lazy zigzags of a score of afternoon canoes, and their score of afternoon flirtations. Here too it is clear that life is life, though lived in miniature. Here too Eve lightly invites, and perhaps as lightly dismisses, miserable Adam at her door. Eden and Rossacre are twin gardens after all.

Not forgetting their serpents.

If the gorgeous beauties of the region invite a Turner, life there demands the airy touch of a Daudet, surely. Fancy your fate among forty thousand good people who are forty thousand seeming friends, and potential enemies! Every one of them has deadly knowledge of every other. Every day they all enjoy the solid satisfaction of criticising forty thousand

other characters, of overseeing forty thousand other lives. The clothes-reel is the true newspaper, and the extra sheets on Mrs. Brown's line have published the arrival of her guest long before his name occurs in the column of "Personal Mention" in the public prints. A hardy soul is Brown himself if he dares the opinion of neighbor Jackson in a hat one penny finer than his well-known salary will allow him. Woe be to Jackson if he appears to public view with so much as a new silver-mounted cane of a Sunday, without due warning or just cause in his business.

"Look at the puffed-up beggar!" Brown will say to his wife. "Presuming above his station!"

Next morning Brown will board an early down-town car and buy a silver cane for himself. No one shall get ahead of Brown.

On one point only do good Rossacrats, of whatever degree, arrive at complete accord. On the magnificence of Rossacre as a metropolis. Never do they weary of impressing this fact upon each other. Nowhere else do young bloods swagger as swagger the bloods of Rossacre. Or with more excellent reason. Salient figures as they are, in a centre of commerce, of fashion and society, the universal object of wonder to visitors from a region of simple farming folk round about, what have they to do but bathe all day long in their own effulgence?

The annoyances of the human lot cannot be simple in a community where every living soul knows the history of every family and the history of every private fortune, down to the very last dollar and the very last comma. And though the good ladies observe a praiseworthy restraint before such openings for gossip, Rossacre is not exclusively comic and it is not

exclusively beautiful. The passions are apt not to languish but to luxuriate in a place of peace.

Certainly they were not allowed to languish in the bosom of one woman who flourished there.

Still, for all of Rossacre's fierce battles in business and politics, for all its petty social assassinations, for all its chatter and gossip, its occasional scandal, its absurd pomposities, the little metropolis has likewise its merry hours, its gay amusements, its pretty romances, its happy people, and their contented lives. These things lift themselves amid the less lovely matters like the quiet hills round about, like the many graceful trees that convert the town into a veritable park.

Come down from your hill and see it for yourself, the duels but the revels too. You are invited to the house of the Hon. Ira Gayland, the important figure of all Rossacre, no less. This evening the Gaylands are giving an overpowering ball.

CHAPTER II

AND a sensation awaits at once. "The Avenue" in front of the Gayland house is clogged by a surging and curious crowd, where elbows take the place of manners.

"Wot's doin'?" from a breathless newcomer who rushes past in the gathering dusk to join the throng. "Somebody hurt?"

"Good Lord, where you been! Summerin' in Yewrope?" he is answered. "We're *all* hurt. Old Gayland 's givin' a blow-out, and nary a wone of us has he asked, that's all."

"Oh, not that we care!" a wit interrupts. "We've just strolled past, accidental-like, to get a few pointers for the carpenters' ball next week." And waves of laughter ripple away over the listeners.

"Bless us!" says a woman, "I could do just as well myself if I had the necessary pennies. All I need is somebody to show my old man how to make a million." And the laughter swells in volume.

"Better ask Judge Gayland how he made *his* million!" comes another voice. "Maybe he 'd be glad to tell you, now that election 's comin' on."

The witticism draws a volley of rejoinders: —

"A-aw, these here \$10,000 millionaires gives me a pain!"

"Wonder if old Gayland 's goin' to be re-elected?"

"Bet you a cigar he ain't!"

"Huh! He can invite us to vote, but he can't invite us to his danst!"

"He 'll be dancin' himself in another way before long. One o' these days that merry gent is goin' to come down in the world, mark my words."

"And *won't* there be a flood of tears when he does it!"

"Aw, cut it! He ain't so bad. No tough egg could have the mighty fine daughter *that* man's got."

"Sa-ay! She is a fine girl. You're right about that. My daughter's in the same sewing circle wid her, and says there ain't a sweeter, nicer girl in the world. And yet they call her 'Cannibal Gayland!'"

The commentary halts before a fresh arrival of guests out of the clatter of horses' hoofs, the whirring of motors, the tooting of horns, and the general hum of the crowd.

"Hurrray!" a man shouts, as a limousine draws up at the curb. "It's the little Senator himself!"

"Little old Senator Banks himself!" the news spreads. "Who-WAY!" they all cheer at mention of the Senator's name, and surge forward to see. In the thick of the cheering a stout little gentleman steps down from his car, bows delightedly right and left, and hands out a stout little lady, whose gown starts a gasp from the feminine contingent.

Behind them another car is already discharging its ornamental freight.

"Mighty sharp feller, the little Senator!" the comment begins again.

"Sharp's the word! He can smell coal twenty mile away and two mile deep!"

"Guess bein' State Treasurer for one term and State Senator for another wa'n't a splendid good thing for him, eh?"

"'Tain't every man gets a start in life like that!"

"Aw, bosh! Pipe it off! *He* 's 'union.' I guess my boy goes to college next month on his money. Nothin' much the matter with *that* kind o' man!"

There the chatter ceases for a moment while they all fix their envy upon this fortunate speaker.

"Well, don't stretch your neck *too* far!" he is rebuked. "Half a dozen other boys about here c'n say the same for the little Senator!"

"'Rah for Walker Landis!" a shout breaks in, as the occupants of the second car step down, not so blessed with popularity, it is soon clear.

"'Rah for the champion mortgage-squeezer in these parts!" some one jeers under his breath.

"Champion pall-bearer, you mean! Don't he look it?"

"Prick that feller, and he 'd squirt yellow!"

And no one softens the comment with reports of college charities as Mr. Landis hurries his wife out of hearing toward the Gayland gateway.

So the High Court of public opinion sits on. And not in bitterness, either — not bitter, at least for the moment, even toward Walker Landis. Dimly their faces start out in the faint greenish glow of the arc-lights, sifted down upon them through the dense fog of foliage in the trees above. They are the factory hands, the shop clerks, the railroad employees, the small merchants, the Jacksons and Browns, all the commoners of Rossacre, all inter-related, among whom one voter offended means all votes lost. Yet these good people are indulgent and kindly, and secretly proud to live in a town where at least the other and more fortunate fellow can live life just as in New York, or as in the very best magazines and novels.

Suddenly there is a violent commotion among them. The sensation has fallen like a thunderclap.

Having crossed the broad sidewalk, Senator Banks, with his lady, waits beside the Gayland gate for Mr. and Mrs. Landis to join them on the long journey up the electrically lighted canopy across the lawn to the Gayland door.

And Mr. and Mrs. Landis almost ignore the Senator's salute, such is their chilly humour, and pass on, with their heads in the air.

"Did you only see that!" some one gasps in the crowd.

"Well, for the love o' Mike!"

"The impudent pup!"

"Well! All *I* can say is, Landis 'll get it, good and plenty, for that!"

"Now, what can *that* mean!"

Some one whistles.

"It means," solemnly pronounces the inevitable and ubiquitous wiseacre, "thet Senator Banks, and all the rest o' the town, has got to look out fer that man Landis. That 's what it means. You saw him give notice."

"'At 's so. Been bad blood between 'em fer some time."

"So ho!" says one. "Brother Landis is goin' to down the little Senator, is he! Well, I bet he doesn't do it without the Senator's consent!"

"Yes, and don't forget that Andy Penning will have some'n to say about it, too!"

"Oh, by the way! Has anybody here seen 'Our Andy'?" an irrelevant woman pipes up. "They can't start 'er up in there without Andy."

"Oh, he 's been in there this long while. I seen him."

"G'wan! That man Andy Penning can't sneak in there without our knowin' it."

"I seen him, and I heard him. He walked here, with Senator Banks's daughter. And he was makin' damagin' remarks about marriage."

"Geel!" says a lady, "He 's in love!"

"Mr. Penning *is* in love," once more the wiseacre comes into his own. Perhaps all the while he has been husbanding that thunderbolt for just such effective use as now. "He 's certainly in love if appearances counts fer anything!"

"Appearances? What do you mean?"

"Andy Penning! 'Our Andy'?"

There is another sensation, clearly. They edge in to hear something more.

"So Sylvia Banks 's got him collared at last?"

"Sylvia Banks nothin'! It 's Judge Gayland's daughter, I tell ye!"

"Why! Syllie and him was as good as engaged! I got that straight!"

"It 's the Gayland girl, I tell ye. Wait and see." . . .

They are still debating, as the Gayland door invites, the intentions — or perhaps the fate? — of a young man whose fortunes are clearly of supreme interest to the town.

"So *that* 's what he's been up to all this while! The sly dog!" comes the echo of a feminine voice.

"To think he could keep it from us so long!" — another. . . .

And then the Gaylands' bowing butler gives welcome.

CHAPTER III

GIVES welcome to the social event that for years has marked the opening of "the season" in Rossacre. And to the opening of the most dramatic episode in the history of Rossacre.

These are the settings of the stage.

"Upper Lincoln" — that is, Upper Lincoln Avenue, where the Gaylands live — is like a tunnel through a mine of leaves, so densely is the street there shaded by its double rows of maples and elms. Back from the curbs, and behind long lines of ornamental iron fence, stretch deep lawns, some of them with fountains and marble statues, all of them fretted with trees and shrubs laid out by landscape architects. And like rocky promontories in these seas of lawn stand the houses of Rossacre's wealthy and elect.

From the very finest of these houses, in the very best manner of Elizabethan Gothic, its chimneys and gables nicking the early dusk of an Autumn sky, a long, striped, and electrically lighted tarpaulin canopy creeps down from the Gayland mansion to the street in front, like a glow-worm swelled to prodigious size. On the Avenue, at the mouth of this canopy, are the thousand or so women, girls and men, blocking the street. Like a fly wading through tar the passing cab forces its way through this throng, its driver purple with inexpressible blasphemy. Motors and carriages with guests can scarcely reach the curb and discharge their brightly clothed and cloaked figures. For a week the three daily newspapers have been

stirring the whole little city to a sense of the importance of this proud occasion.

Now it is time for the dance; and at the inward end of that long tarpaulin gallery Judge Gayland's awesome bowing butler, Berkeley, in a neat wine-coloured livery, swings open the ponderous black carven oak door, and, as he opens it, smites your ears with a medley of prattle and laughter and the sobbings of fiddles from a hidden orchestra. Your eyes he smites with the glare of many electric lights glowing through alabaster shades, beaming upon a scene that might really have been the boast of a larger world than Rossacre, and of a fatter purse than that at the command of Judge Gayland.

However, a little thing like meeting his bills never troubled Judge Gayland.

Truly this is a festal moment even in the great Gayland household, howbeit Judge Gayland would prefer his guests to believe that they are admitted to see little more than the everyday routine of his life. One of the little prides of Gayland's life it is that his regular retinue of servants needs no reinforcements for even a gathering like this. Always he has Berkeley; and Betty the parlor maid; and Delphine, at the beck of Mrs. Gayland and daughter Annabel; and Jonathan the coachman; and Etta the cook; and over them all Mrs. Branstane the housekeeper, to devise and oversee. These, in the perfection of their discipline, have always impressed Rossacre with the almost infinite resources of Gayland — which is precisely what Judge Gayland has most desired. Not a board in his floors but was laid for just such a crush as presses upon it now. There, inside his drawing-room door you find him, greeting his incoming

guests. Beside him, in a black gown, streaked with white, decently décolletée, stands his wife, effusively happy, albeit slow-moving, on account of animating a mass of avoirdupois that would have thrust dignity upon a kitten.

"So good of you to come, Mr. Blank," she is panting, after the approved Rossacre formula. "Let me present you to my daughter, Mr. Blank."

From your bow to a young lady of twenty, and scarcely so bulky, you carry away a fleeting impression of much curling light-brown hair, a vision of two grey-blue eyes set in a face that is very very thoroughbred, very very girlish, and, it occurs to you, very full of mischief. Such is Miss Gayland. You may think to pause and impress this young lady with some very bright remark — and receive from Mrs. Gayland instead only a very preoccupied "Ee-yess, ee-yess," in reply.

Lastly you shake the soft and pulpy hand of your host the Judge. A person of some port and pomp you find him, with a trick of rubbing together those soft hands of his, and of resting them on the lapels of his coat. He has dashing theatrical grey hair, and two blue eyes that are for ever smiling, and a black moustache that shows in striking contrast against his ruddy cheeks. In swagger garments, that came from London, you would learn, if you inquired about such matters as Senator Banks did, the jovial Judge acquires an air of jaunty distinction.

Dismissed by the receiving Gaylands, you find yourself in a throng of guests, of a flattering density, and lost in a jungle of palms from the Gayland conservatories. Over your head is a ceiling crossed by heavy oaken beams. Under your feet are floors of box, that

blink through spaces between old rugs of amazing nap and pattern — some of them bought in Constantinople. Above the heavy oak wainscot the walls are littered with paintings, some of them signed with names that compel respect — Benson, Tarbell, Decamp, and Childe Hassam. Embroidered hangings are carelessly flung back from the doorways, that open vistas across more expanses of palm and of people, in library, in study, in a far flowery conservatory. Across the wide, baronial hall is yet another string of rooms, equally populous with palm and humanity, and equally one solid drone of conversation.

“Well, my young friend!”

The assailant who has slapped your shoulder is Claverson, young Rossacre surgeon. Rising man, Claverson. Already his children are snubbing the Brown boys, till lately their playmates. For a moment you and Claverson shout together.

“Capture the dowagers first, my boy, then all is yours!” Claverson winks. “Now, there — over there — you see that elderly woman in pink — in pink, mark you! — so chesty you fear she will burst the bonds of her attire? It is Mrs. Wentworth. After Mrs. Gayland herself ” — and again Claverson winks — “she is the first of our drawing-room queens. Back in that corner and black with rage, because she hasn’t spent an extra penny to outdo Mrs. Wentworth’s daring pink, is Mrs. Landis, in lavender, which she has worn at least twice before. Mrs. Landis is — er — a newcomer in our midst. I take it you understand?” — and once more Dr. Claverson winks. “Over yonder is Isabel Warren, aged I don’t know what. I complimented her on her youthful appear-

ance, and she nearly snapped my head off — what you might call a hot-Waterloo for me. She 's yearning for a Man — any man — but preferably Mr. Penning. Notice her wistful eye. Follow it and you will discover at once where Penning has hidden himself. Never propose to that girl unless you mean to be taken seriously. Her 'Yes' is hung on a hair-trigger."

In a near corner is Mrs. Landis herself, who next receives Dr. Claverson's attentions. "How do you do?" he devilishly inquires of the professional invalid.

"Pretty well, thank you, Doctor. But don't you think I am looking badly again?"

"I think you are looking perfectly natural, Madam," he replies.

But Nature has mercifully constituted Mrs. Landis to be proof against such a shaft. Only Mrs. Barlow is equally radiant. Daughter Julia, will you believe, has been holding Mr. Penning, no less, for twenty minutes, in the most promising conversation.

"Julia, bring him to me this minute," her proud and hopeful mother commands. And dutifully Penning submits. "He is to be *my* satellite for a while."

"But, Madam, I should rather be a *son* to you!" the gallant laughs and bows — with dangerous effects upon Mrs. Barlow.

So, the famous Penning, debated by the crowd outside!

A tall fellow, who looks as if he might have been an athlete a few years before in college. Thirty-four, probably. Remarkable air of settled conviction in his face, for one of his age. Blue-grey eyes, brown hair, slightly wavy, brushed straight back; and in

attire that marks what generous concessions a really strong man may make to the fashion-plate.

In a few moments he is among another group of ladies — the sort who read Wells, and Dostoievsky, and Verhaeren, and pronounce them correctly — and the particular mystery of Penning has deepened, along with the quality of his speech.

"Poor fellow!" Penning is saying. "He wanted a quiet life, and he — married!"

Merrily the ladies laugh, and one of them laments, "So young, and yet so hardened!"

"Can't help it, after what I 've seen," he laughs in return.

"Then I don't envy you your friends. The American husbands *I* know are happy — and quiet."

"Ah, I 'm sure their American wives would never permit them to look anything else!"

"Is — ~~is~~ that a compliment?" The lady scans his laughing eyes, and, sure now of his subtler meaning, shakes her head and sighs, "Worse, and more of it! What a pretty patriot you are!"

"Madam," says Penning gravely, "I am not a patriot, I am a Republican."

And, blunting the edge of his shaft with a very mellow quality of laughter, he moves away, and leaves another of the ladies to comment,

"I simply cannot fathom that man. He 's good-natured, but so mocking and so — remote."

"Oh, *now* I know!" pipes a pretty young thing in the group. "For days I have wondered what figure that man reminds me of. It's Kitchener! Of course he means what he says. He hates us, and shows it."

"My dear," replies a motherly personage, whose eyes have before this, it is clear, distinguished a few

hawks from handsaws, "he does suggest a bit the Kitchener we 've heard of. But I think I have Mr. Penning's measure. Have hope, and don't let him deceive you. He is simply a very shy man, who is afraid of women, and throws those mystifications against them like a — like a barbed wire entanglement — to protect his tender feelings." . . .

Suddenly the signal to the dance is sounded on a clarion trumpet in the orchestra. Up the broad stair, round the wide gallery on the second floor the hundred guests troop arm in arm, and up a final flight to the great ball-room which spreads its oaken beaming and its glassy floor over the whole house beneath it. Something of a show-place, too, that ball-room, with its carved open trusses and braces. Architects from as far as Philadelphia have come to take note of it. To-night festoons of ivy and oakleaves, trailing over the beams and down the columns, have made it a miniature forest, and all the settees along the walls have been turned into grottos of roses and smilax. Hidden behind the palms in a balcony the orchestra whines and toots into tune. Beaus are in hot competition filling dance orders for expectant belles.

The music strikes up, and so the night is frolicked away.

CHAPTER IV

FLIRTED away, chattered away, danced away.

Certainly Rossacre is no safe retreat for a timorous young man. Danger stalks him from a thousand pairs of eyes, shading all the way from blue to brown, from angel to coquette.

There, in the nearest smilax bower, sits a tearing beauty who would have made a Reynolds, a Romney still greater. How they would have gloried in her fresh cheeks, in her mass of gold hair! What would they not have made her blues say — so demure but so sure of their power, and so mischievous in its employment!

“Who is it? Who is it?” you demand of Claverson.

“Isn’t she a pippin! Sylvia Banks. The boys call her ‘Silvery.’ Her father has a bit of coin, you know.”

Pippin indeed! “Silvery” forsooth! Already you are jealous of the half dozen puppies who sport about her, without the wit to know, as you do, how rare anywhere is such superlative sweetness! If Mr. Penning has turned away from that, you have a burning opinion of his taste — or a burning curiosity to meet his later choice!

“Eh, Sylvia?” one of the puppies is saying. “Off with the old love, on with the new. I saw him with you on the links yesterday. And my word, it took you four hours to make the round. Eh, Sherry?” And he points his clumsy innuendo with a hearty dig in the ribs of a handsome laughing devil standing by.

What wouldn't you give to have Sherry's good reason for blushing so proudly, for inspiring Sylvia's pretty pretended frown!

"Was it four lost balls, or one lost heart, that took you so long?" another idiot gibbers.

It isn't witty. It isn't deep. A cynic like Claver-son laughs at such frisking of kitten and puppy, this absolute of unimportance, and thinks it praiseworthy and superior to forget that in his own case he solved the principal question of his life in much the same manner. What wiser instinct it tells these young things they are living the one beautiful and spotless moment the world will ever give them, and warns them to make the most of it?

Everywhere about this flashing of mischievous eyes, this parting of pretty lips, the ripple of that laughter which only once in life is so light, so gay. What a void is left when that laughing devil Sherry Brookes leads Sylvia away to a dance! And the impudent boy who swept Julia Barlow out of your very arm and away downstairs, alleging a "look at the night-blooming cereus," for all the excuse he gave you!

A ready imitator overheard him, and soon other pairs drift away, on the same quest. That night-blooming cereus is in universal request. They are seeking it, two and two, in the library, behind the palms; in the drawing-room, behind the piano; even out on the moonlit lawn. It wasn't there — it wasn't anywhere — but you know they found it.

Didn't you overhear one mother remark to another — and agreed with her, too, —

"Dear me, this night-blooming cereus is becoming serious indeed!"

An ass named Barnes even proposed the same quest

to Miss Gayland herself. "Aw — aw, Miss Gaylan'," he is saying, "don't you know, you might be just the opposite of a Mormon, if you wished!"

Whatever such drivel may mean, "society" affords it in Rossacre as everywhere else; and Miss Gayland is in for a liberal share of it. There she sits, in her flowery bower, a dozen silly fops about her. Poor lady, she has the misfortune to be the catch of the town, with her father's wealth and distinction, and her own thoroughbred face, and witty tongue, and warm heart. Never warmer than at that moment, you are sure, as the celebrated Penning rushes up to her rescue and swings her away in a dance. And for that dance and for two more, Miss Gayland is seen no more of her professional dangles.

For, somehow, the lawn has invited the notice of Miss Gayland and Mr. Penning. There, soon, the Autumn air, it occurs to Mr. Penning, is poorly tempered to Miss Gayland's filmy attire — "a puff of blue smoke," he calls it — and they explore the palms, the orchids, and all the Judge's pet blooms, in the conservatory. With a gift for that sort of thing, the Judge has cunningly timed his grand occasion to a full moon, with hopes of luck in the weather, and the weather has been duly obedient to his hopes. With more cunning still the Judge has dimmed the inner lights to a minimum glow, and the place is completely exposed to the pitiless eye of the willing moon above.

"Don't you think father organizes the moon, and things, rather well?" says Miss Gayland, with her face brazenly raised for a kiss — from the moon.

The reply is a hearty laugh and the perpetration of a kiss — on a finger-tip — by Mr. Penning instead.

It is notable now that his mocking remarks have ceased.

"What a pity it is," says he, "that we always sleep through such nights as this. And when there are only about two hundred and fifty full and clear moons in a lifetime. I hate to miss one of them."

"Yes, isn't there something sad about the moon! I never look out on a night like this without thinking of the hundreds of grey-haired women who have never had sweet things said to them under that beautiful thing up there."

"I am certain," says Penning, "that the maker of a speech like that will never join those grey-haired women!" And as Miss Gayland beams almost like the moon, he adds, "Only, I begin to be certain that I am not the one to save you. Only five dances all evening! Every man here has been as fortunate."

"Hush!" Miss Gayland peers about to see if they may be overheard. "You forget that election is coming on!"

So they laugh, and ply their wits, and bandy those innuendos which say nothing and mean all.

"I believe I've got a better opinion than yours of your moon," says Penning, then, when words have failed them for a moment, and the magnet of the sky attracts their eyes again. "Think what it knows. Think of the millions and millions of lovely things it really *has* heard. And the millions more it is going to hear. I know what I'm talking about, because" — he smiled down at her — "I'm going to add to the number myself."

"That's number one?"

"And here's number two."

There, too soon, this swift progression, arithmetical and other, came to a stop, and the pretty stage took on a bit of real drama.

Through the door came the voice of a man, to the staccato accompaniment of footsteps.

"It's my last oath, I tell you," the voice was saying — instantly recognized as the property of Sherry Brookes. "If you won't hear me here, will you listen when I take you home?"

After a pause a soft contralto published the presence of Sylvia Banks.

"Are you sure of taking me home?" she asked. "Besides, you know how eager father always is to turn off the lights."

In the misty glow they made out Sherry, dropped disconsolate upon a seat behind the farthest cluster of palms, with Sylvia standing apart, absorbed in an orchid.

"Seems to me, Sylvia," they heard Sherry say, "you yourself are always ready to *turn off the lights for me*."

"No. Waiting for you to turn them up."

"And I've been a long time about it?"

"A long time, Sheridan."

Between all these remarks a pause.

"It has been long." The remark seemed to come from a bowed head. Then more clearly — "Who is going to take you home, Sylvia? Not that fellow Irvin Crist, surely!"

"He's a very nice boy."

"A Rhinestone in the rough! . . . Well, I don't care, so long as it isn't Andy Penning. Your father seems to have given him a patent on you!"

"Mr. Penning seems to be — occupied with — another set of lights."

"The — devil — you say! Do you mean Annabel? Why, your father will have him jailed for it!"

Sylvia bent more busily over the orchid. So busily that Sherry came and stood beside her — where they blocked the only avenue of escape.

"Sylvia," he said, close to her ear, and yet audibly, because eagerly, "awful rummy that I've been, I'm not such a cad as to want to profit at another chap's expense. But — if I 'turn up the lights' — isn't there a chance for me? I tell you I've sworn my last oath."

"To me? Or to your new room-mate, Mr. Penning?"

"Sylvia! . . . It's a lot I owe to Andy. He's done a good deal for me. More than you'll ever know —"

Sylvia's glance of sharp inquiry halted him.

"But not everything, Sylvia. A chap like me has got to owe all there is in him to a girl. And in my case, that's you."

Sylvia looked him over. No woman is armoured against such a stroke at her essential being. Handsome, thoroughbred, gifted, debonair, and tearing wastrel — often Sylvia had wondered what Rossacre, what her own life, would be like without the once inseparable Sherry of her girlhood. And she never forget the obeisance that he made her then, so grave and earnest for him. She remembered that, without touching her hand — as if not to contaminate it — he made a graceful pretense of kissing it.

"Good night, Sylvia," he was saying. "I shan't trouble you again to-night. But you're going to be proud of me yet. That alone will be a pretty nice thing to owe to you. I shouldn't care to owe it to anyone else. Good night!"

Sherry paused, with thought and a smile and the moon lighting the face that he submitted to Sylvia's quizzical study. At least his exacting judge was enough concerned, it occurred to him, to resent a rival agency in his reform. Then he rushed away, to hide a sudden propensity to chuckle at her expense, but chiefly to hunt up some sort of temptation right away, and wither it, and accomplish something at once. And slowly, with a shrewd little smile of her own, perhaps of understanding and approval, Sylvia followed him. . . .

They heard her footfalls dying away in the passage leading back to the dining-room — lost, finally, in a burst of distant and masculine laughter.

"Well!" said Penning. "Your father's moon is in *fairly* good working order, don't you think?"

For an instant Annabel scanned him closely. "They say one can never tell when you mean what you say," she said. "But I think that's because you generally mean a good deal. And — *I* trust your meaning, whatever it is."

Again the distant laughter burst forth.

"I hope," said Annabel, as it died away, "father hasn't made the punch too strong for poor Sylvia. Sherry, I mean!" She laughed. "But perhaps it's just the same."

CHAPTER V

IN the distance, during an intermission, in an atmosphere mellowed by agencies other than the moonlight, Annabel's fears have been more expertly and candidly appraised.

In the card-room, normally the Judge's study, the bloods, ten of them, have gathered for a sedative, liquid or vaporous.

Honest enough chaps, all of them, but patterned after the one type that a siren outer world seems to leave behind to the inland town. Away fly the braver spirits, and bequeath this easy importance to the lazier crew at home. One of them is a young lawyer by profession, with a phenomenally long drive at golf. One is a capital waltzer, with an incidental interest in architecture. One is head clerk in the freight offices. But a single portrait suffices for them all. All are slavishly concerned with the girls and the fashions — as established by the heroes of shirt and collar advertisements. All bring their hair and their clothing to the same lofty ideal. Acutely aware of themselves, blissfully unaware of the world, they differ only in the colour of their eyes, in the sound of their voices.

Even in their reactions to an incomparable array of girlish beauty, they are all alike.

"Well — well — *well!*" one of them can scarcely wait for the closing of the door to say. "Things are certainly doing in the little old town! Did you only notice!"

"Notice what?"

"Notice what! Were you asleep? The ankles, for one thing. I quite approve of the prevailing style in skirts, thank you!" —

"Yep," a third interrupts. "Even old Isabel Warren gets by."

"Isabel Warren? Was-a-belle Warren, you mean!"

"Well, her little pile in the bank looks as young as ever to me!"

They all speak at once, lighting cigars while Berkeley observes their taste in liquors.

"Yes, but did you only *notice!*" the original speaker finds an opening again.

"Notice *what?*"

"Oh — nothing. Nothing except that the great and only Penning has either got the G. B. from Sylvia Banks, or else he's been thumbing Bradstreet and found that Gayland has more money. I heard that the Senator got a fee-rightful snub from Walker Landis. And they say Gayland is going to be defeated for the Judgeship. Anything to notice!"

"Piffle! I noticed nothing, except that Penning was more human than I ever saw him before. Never knew he could be agreeable. To everybody. What's started the thaw?"

"Agreeable especially to Annabel Gayland, eh?"

"He was, all right. Guess he smells the old man's money."

"Oh, damn money! For land's sake, somebody, tell me who is this Mrs. Bumstead, or Brimstone, or something — housekeeper here, or whatever she is! Funny I never noticed her till to-night. But to-night? Say!"

"Did you notice her too?"

"Notice her? Say! I caught her eye. My stars, what an eye!

"Some little eye! I caught it myself."

"Something doing there, my boy; something doing there!"

"H'm, I've always wondered who that woman is. And how she happened here. Something odd about it. Do you think —?"

"Well, all I can say is, that before I'm a year older I'm going to get hep there. That's *my* ultimatum."

"Sounds like Sherry Brookes."

"Which reminds me. Where is Sherry Brookes? Talk about driving a horse to water! I couldn't get him to *smell* the punch. And it is some punch, believe me. The shock nearly killed me. What ails old Sherry?"

"O-oh, damn Sherry! That Mrs. Branstane gets me. Who the devil is she? Why have I never seen her before?"

"She does seem to have blossomed out all of a sudden. I wonder —"

"Bother Mrs. Branstane! Where's old Sherry? I miss him. Nothing goes right without Sherry."

"I've got my own hunch where he is. He's wallowing in the moonlight — the little old moonlight — with little old Sylvia Banks. That's where."

"With *Sylvia*?"

"You said it."

"You're off a mile. What about Penning? He's got a mortgage on that."

"Mortgage nothing. It's Sherry Brookes again. That's what I'm *telling* you. The Babbling Brookes. He's even gone and turned a new leaf, for her dear sake, what do you think!"

"Page 2100!"

"Just for a minute, while her old man's back is turned!"

"The old man's got a back to nurse, too. I saw the stab it got from Walker Landis. It's all up with the little Senator if that fellow gets after him."

"Well, it is wonderful how that man Landis has got on. President of his own bank now. And nothing but a hostler a few years ago!"

"Damn Landis! How about our little dance? Best one the Gaylands have ever given!"

"And one of the last."

"Nonsense! What do you mean?"

"What I say, that's all." In a whisper — "Things don't seem to be solid round here any more. You can feel it in the air."

"Ah-ha! Mrs. Branstane, eh? . . . Where did she come from, anyway? What is she for?"

"Where did the Senator come from, for that matter? And the Judge? And —"

"And Penning. Don't forget the great Penning!"

"Now you'll know! Here's Ted Lacy, by heck."

"'Lo, Ted. Come in. And shut the door. We've ordered for you. Sit down."

"And settle an argument, Ted. There's Senator Banks. Who is he, anyway?"

The gentleman addressed as Ted seats himself languidly at the large long table, waits a moment for Berkeley to appear with his rickey, and sips it when it arrives. Looking about him with an air of superb authority he condescends to say,

"Nothing."

Lacy is a short man of fifty, with two dabs of white whisker under his ears — a misplaced and misguided

bishop. It is said of him that he stands so frequently in the street-cars ostensibly in deference to the ladies but really in deference to the immaculate and invariable crease in his trousers.

"But is it true that the Senator once laid bricks?"

"He did."

"What is he worth to-day?"

"About five hundred thou. — if he can keep it."

"And what's old Gayland got?"

Lacy inhales his drink for a moment. "Judge Gayland used to be worth about seven hundred thousand."

"What has he now?"

"Bright's disease."

"And a housekeeper!"

"How do *you* know he has a housekeeper?" Lacy fixes the guilty speaker with a glittering eye.

"Who is that woman?" they chorus.

Lacy selects a long cigar from the generous box on the table. "All I know" — he lights it — "is what I have heard. The story is that Gayland and she were boy and girl together — in some village, I believe, at the western end of the State. Her family took him in, an orphan. And they raised him and made him."

"Now he's returning the compliment?"

"He is said," Lacy fended, "to be repaying the debt."

"Well, anyway, where did he get all his money. He hasn't any brains."

"Perhaps" — Lacy drew a long puff — "that's why he got it."

"No, but really?"

"Merely owned a farm that the railroad needed for a freight yard. And was lucky with his investments."

"Well, is Penning going to land his daughter?"

"Do you really think that fellow is going to be Governor, or Senator, or something?"

"Mr. Penning is an incalculable man."

"Oh, really! Then why does he bother with Ross-acre!"

Lacy laughs, out of the fullness of his wisdom. "Rossacre is his little step-ladder."

"Damned snob!"

"No. Only shy."

"Shy on manners, certainly! What has he buried under that tombstone of a face?"

"Nothing dark that I know of," Lacy laughs at their jealousy. "Pretty wild lad, Penning, when he first came here. H'm! I remember one night when he got so tight that we were all scared and had him haled to the hospital. Next morning Brother Penning was rather surprised to wake up in a nice pink embroidered silk nightie!"

"Good Lord! Penning?"

"In a thing like that? Where did he get it?"

Again Lacy fixed the guilty speaker with a sententious eye. "No man is obliged to incriminate himself," he murmured.

They all laughed, and required fresh drinks in celebration of the witticism.

And, stimulated by the applause and by a second rickey, Lacy continues, "I heard somebody say he felt uncertain in this household. I've felt it myself. Don't believe the Judge will be re-elected."

"Who's going to crowd him out?"

"That — is on the lap of the gods."

"Penning, I suppose?"

"Then you know something?"

Lacy studies the ceiling for a moment, then launches his thunderbolt. "If he wants it."

"*Penning?* My word!" One of the boys leaps up and whistles.

"Some-thing do-ing in the little old town! Well — well — *well!*"

"Shut up! Here he is!"

Enter Mr. Penning, with hat and coat. "Good morning, gentlemen," he says. "Nice dance?"

No one can muster an answer.

Then Lacy: "Good Lord, Penning! Going so soon? Where 're you bound for at this hour of the night?"

"Home. Little bit of work."

"But, man, you'll cave in one of these days if you work all night!"

"Berkeley, one of those juleps of yours, will you? Er — *you* know the kind — *without* the whole flora and fauna and pharmacopœia of North America in it."

Leisurely Penning sips the concoction, and then, accepting a cigarette with an amiable nod: "Nobody seen Sherry Brookes?"

"Nowhere to be found."

"H'm!" Penning muses, and slowly melts his frown into a smile of satisfaction. "I can't understand his sensational virtue." And with a word or two more he excuses himself and retires to his rooms at The Club.

"Has any one first aid for frostbite?" says one, in feeble mimicry of Penning's precise speech, as he withdraws.

"That man," Lacy pronounces, "is the decentest chap I know. You hate him because he upsets your self-conceit."

"Not mine, if you please — with such posing!"

"That's all a blind. Penning knows that that sort of thing is expected of him, and he lays it on a little thick, in irony, just to amuse himself. If you don't believe he's something of a fellow, wait and see what he accomplishes with that masterly silence of his. A year ago he could have had the State Senatorship. That gift he knew was the apple of Banks's eye — and Banks got it. There's Penning for you. I tell you the Powers have got him down for something. I've battled him in court and I know!"

"Well, damn your man Penning, anyway. Where's Sherry? There's a chap for you! Bully old Sherry. Where is that boy!"

"Oh," — Lacy — "he'll be here in a minute. Can't keep Sherry and a merry party far apart."

"Bully old Sherry! He's a devil, but he'd pawn his last shirt for any poor beggar. Let's order him a drink."

"Order that boy a drink? Let's order him a drunk!"

All ten of the boys indulged their ingenuity in weird inventions for Sherry — and further braved the conventions by consuming their fancies. In two minutes half of them felt an inward summons toward the outer air. To those fixed to their chairs Sheridan Brookes at last disclosed himself.

The colloquy was brief, however.

"For the love o' Mike!" — Their slang at best was a bit musty. "Where you been?"

"Wha's a matter with your face? You look as if you'd just seen your Maker. And I never thought you'd meet!"

"What's a matter, Sherry, ol' man? Haven't been larking with our new friend Mrs. Branstane, have

you? Just like you to score there first, you devil! Let's cut this and organize a little skirt party, what do you say, Sherry!"

"Not to-night, thank you," Sherry ventures, careless of the shock.

"Wha-at! Oh, look at him! He's disguised himself by being sober!"

"Nonsense, Sherry! No use goin' to bed, old f'lah! Soon time for breakfast. Only time for a little tear in between. What d'ya say?"

"Not now, if you don't mind."

"Oh, shucks, old f'lah! You're not yourself."

"Sherry," Lacy pronounces — for Lacy always pronounced gravely, and now with the extra gravity that issues from punch, "Sherry is going to show us to what lengths of sobriety he is willing to go!"

"Well," Sherry spoke up brightly, gleefully, "do you fellows really want to know why I looked in here? Just to see if I could tear away again. And I can."

He slammed the door upon six cases of apoplexy.

The boys stared at each other in unanimous stupefaction, and one of them voiced it — "Tell — tell mother that I died bravely! . . . Well — well! . . . Is this heaven, or is it my own, my native town! Something *doing*, b'lie' me!"

CHAPTER VI

THE one person in Judge Gayland's house that night least aware of these ominous portents is the one they chiefly threaten — the genial Judge Gayland himself, rubbing his hands and sweeping to all his grandest bow, in the manner of the perfect host.

"Ah! Good evening, Mrs. Barlow. And Mrs. Wentworth! Your presence flatters me! Ah, Mrs. Landis, allow me to present Mr. Blank. Miss Stanton of Washington, Mr. Blank. So happy to see you with us, Miss Warren! You know Mr. Blank? Mr. Blank do you know. . . . Ah, Miss Siddons, you look happy this evening. These bowers in the corners — I know you young people are blessing me for that happy thought! Ha, ha!"

So he chatters, laughs, makes obeisance among his guests.

With the men Judge Gayland has got on scarcely so well. If for nothing else, they hate him for his success in impressing the women. Gayland the vain boy they may never have known; but there is no mistaking their wholesome contempt for this inflation of the Judge of their acquaintance.

In the course of the evening the Judge has come upon Senator Banks. "Well, Senator! And, my dear man, are you having your fill of enjoyment?" The Judge has had but the most innocent aim at jocosity; yet, fresh from the smiles of some dowager,

he has contrived to flavour the question with the usual pinch of condescension.

"Oh, hello, Judge!" the Senator responds, shaking the hand of his host. "Mighty jolly crowd you have here — mighty fine! You do know how to entertain; allow me to say that!" The Senator has in him the born tradesman's instinct to be outwardly offended at nothing. Inwardly he was thinking, "You gay old cock, now aren't you in your element, strutting before all these hens! But for all your grand airs, my man, I can buy you out any day!"

Moreover the Senator was still troubled by that little incident of Landis's snub at the gate.

"Pooh, pooh, man," the Judge protests: "what is life for but to be enjoyed!" — which was pretty much the Judge's philosophy in life.

As it was, even one woman in Rossacre had never been blind to the character of Judge Gayland — perhaps from enjoying superior advantages of observation. And that very night "things" began to be "doing."

At the very height of the festivities Mrs. Gayland was summoned from an exhilarating confab with Mrs. Brantley and Mrs. Wyeth, touching upon the peculiarities of a certain Mrs. Travis. The summons came from her housekeeper, Mrs. Branstane.

There a truly tragic figure appeared upon the scene, and something truly significant was immediately doing in Rossacre.

She was standing at the top of the stairway, in the little entry leading into the ball-room.

"Well, are they ready for the refreshments?" Mrs. Branstane folded her arms and looked down upon her mistress.

"Oh, I don't know, Nellie; I don't know," Mrs. Gayland gasped out of her flustered chest, smiling back to the group she had just left, her head still too full of that shocking Mrs. Travis to focus itself suddenly upon the burning issue of refreshments. "I don't know," she repeated, waiting for her ideas to gather and condense.

"You never do know!"

It happened to be the truth, though it came from a servant.

"Why, *Nel-lie!*"

"I say you never know your own mind!"

"Why, *Nel-lie!*" But Mrs. Gayland's tone, not that of withering indignation at such language even from a superior servant, has rather the aggrieved surprise of one who is suddenly and wrongly accused of crime. "What can you *mean?*"

"I mean what I say! Shall — I — have — the — refreshments served *now?* The things have been ready this long while!"

"Have they, have they?" In consternation, hurt, her mind burdened with overmuch to say, Mrs. Gayland caught at this testimony to the efficiency of her household. "Well, then, do you think we might serve now, Nellie? What do you think?"

"Bosh! That's for you to decide. I can't see to everything!"

Mrs. Branstane's face was curiously flushed and eager. It was as if she were risking a rash experiment. Mrs. Gayland had never seen her dark eye so unpleasantly piercing. The woman was not rebelling at overwork. Mrs. Branstane had deliberately chosen to make this an epic moment in the life of her mistress.

"Well, then," Mrs. Gayland panted, discomfited, to

be thrown so mercilessly, for once, upon her own resources. "I — I guess it would be all right to serve now. But what do you really think, Nellie?"

"Good heavens! Serve and be done with it!"

"Do you really —?"

"Serve, I say, and be done with it!"

"Why-y, Nellie! What is the matter, that you should treat me so? I've never seen you like this before."

So spoke twelve years of Mrs. Gayland's steady reliance upon a readier wit than her own, which had always been dependable upon just such occasions as this, demanding decision. Now an awkward and uncalled-for rebellion in this useful and regular dependent! She was on the verge of tears.

"Oh, go back to your tomfoolery!" Mrs. Branstane snapped her jaw, and turned away.

Moving unsteadily back into her gay crowd again, bewildered, her lip quivering, Mrs. Gayland looked over the ball-room, shook her head sadly, and delivered herself of this conclusive judgment on the world:

"E-eh," she moaned, "there 's always *sump*-thing!"

So Rossacre's social sovereign reeled at the concussion of her housekeeper's unaccountable displeasure. Her whole world was rocked in a revolution. Refreshments of the most refined description were served, it is true. But in Mrs. Gayland's mind were thoughts of a morrow. She had tasted of a new power; a new antagonism had arisen to cloud her home. It might be that life itself would be different. In any case there would have to be a reckoning with Nellie, perhaps painful; and she shrank from that. And for the remainder of the night the dancers swam across Mrs. Gayland's blurred vision unseen.

At length the clocks mercifully tolled the hour of three. "Three o'clock in the forenoon," as one of the professional wits was pleased to put it. Even so splendid a function was forced to its close — mercifully so, for one person. Still gaily Judge Gayland and his daughter bade "Good morning" to their guests. Sonorously Jonathan the coachman ordered up their cars and carriages. The great, the supreme event of the season in Rossacre was ended.

And Mrs. Gayland trudged off to a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER VII

SO did her husband the Judge trundle off to a troubled sleep.

First he bade his wife Good night, and then on pretense of seeing in person to the locking of the house, he deliberately sought an interview with his superior servant, though it cost him a fit of trembling and a bit of effort.

They met in the dining-room.

"See here, Nellie!" the Judge gasped, when he had entered the room and closed the door behind him. "So you 've begun on the wife! I overheard what you said about the refreshments — and the way you said it! I 've been expecting this. But — but, see here! Haven't I really done enough for you? Eh?"

Mrs. Branstane was standing at the great round mahogany table, sorting over a pile of soiled napery destined for the laundry. At his question her hands halted at her work, and only her eyes — two deeply set carbuncles — moved as they searched his face, with a faint expression of amusement.

"None of your sneers," she said quietly. "I do as I please."

"You 've always done as you pleased, with me!" the Judge attempted a bit of pleasantry. He even stepped nearer. "That 's the devil about you!" He came nearer still, still laughing, though not now successfully.

The laughter flickered out altogether, and his eyes widened in wonder, as Mrs. Branstane retreated a step

or two round the table. When he reached for her hand she snatched it away.

"What — what's the matter?" he said.

"I've finished with you," she answered.

Puzzled, the Judge backed away, till he was stopped by the wall that served as a prop to his shaking legs. "You're right!" he laughed, now in another humour. "You've certainly finished with me! Or nearly."

Something in Mrs. Branstane's mien put a stop to that sort of laughter as well.

"Oh, of course I didn't mean that, Nellie," he said hurriedly. "Even if it's true, what of it! What of it!" he repeated, to emphasize his magnanimity. "But surely —" He stepped forward again — though again Mrs. Branstane retreated. "Surely —" He held out his hand in appeal. "Surely you — you won't trouble the wife? Leave things as they were, between you and me?"

"That's for me to decide."

"But what's the good of it, Nellie!" Once more the Judge came nearer. This time Mrs. Branstane did not retreat. In consequence the Judge found himself not encouraged but gazing instead straight into her unflinching eyes. A moment he faced her — and then tried still another tack. "By George, but the refreshments *were* good, Nellie!"

She neither smiled, softened, nor answered.

"And you yourself, you looked bully!"

"So? . . . How many of your guests noticed that?"

The Judge fell back. "So!" he said, so much more occupied with comprehension than with speech that he barely whispered the words, "So that's it, is it?"

"That's it," said Mrs. Branstane, calmly turning

again to the sorting of her napkins. A moment or two he watched her, and then she finished, "Good night."

"Oh, see here, Nellie!" With a quick motion the Judge caught one of her hands. "Now, see here! You're a wonder. You know I think that, don't you? There's nobody in the whole town can beat you for brains. I've always said that. Time and again. You know that."

"And that's where it all ends. . . . Where it always *has* ended." Mrs. Branstane withdrew her hand and went on with the napkins.

"You mean —?"

Mrs. Branstane, without looking up, shrugged her shoulders.

"You mean, I — Haven't I done enough, Nellie?"

The faintest satiric smile played about her lips.

"But, great God, what *more* can I do!"

Mrs. Branstane halted her work at the very pose in which her thought, whatever it was, arrested her. It wasn't necessary for her to speak; her eyes attended to that. What they conveyed the Judge answered in a startled remark,

"What — what do you mean to do?"

Slowly Mrs. Branstane's gaze gathered into a smile, and then suddenly she fell again upon the napkins.

"Good night," she repeated, with a quiet laugh.

"But what do you mean to do!"

"Good night," she said.

"Now — see — here, Nellie —"

There Mrs. Branstane fairly frightened the Judge with the blaze of wrath that stopped his accustomed flattery. Already her eyes had finished him, but once more she said, and very finally, "Good night."

"Good night," he answered, submissively, and went to bed.

But not to sleep.

Not to sleep until a last thought came to relieve and solace him.

"Well, anyway," the Judge chuckled as the thought came to him, "Annabel is too clever for any Nellie. *She's* safe, thank her lucky stars!"

CHAPTER VIII

ABOUT the eleventh hour on the morning after the ball, Mrs. Branstane might have been discovered on her knees in the dining-room. And scarcely in the attitude of prayer. Notwithstanding the recent cataclysm of the routine housecleaning, Mrs. Branstane was polishing the feet of the table — whose heavily scarred condition will be instantly clear to the sapient.

On that table the evening before the Gayland punch-bowl had offered its spirited contribution to the pleasures of the ball.

The little episode touching the refreshments has not fled Mrs. Branstane's memory, and that Mrs. Branstane is still in a state of mind is made plain in the exaggerated vigour of her strokes as she toils at her polishing.

To Mrs. Branstane the legs of that table typified all the wrongs and indignities of her existence. Her hand trembled from the intensity of her anger as she worked. There had to be mere slaves, Mrs. Branstane granted — to cook, to sew, to serve at table, and drive the motors. Fallible creatures, all of them. But the idea of such an order of things as permitted silly fools like the guests of last night to simper and dance, while their superiors, like Mrs. Branstane, drudged for their private enjoyment! Mrs. Branstane yearned at that moment for some of them to be there to address on the subject! . . .

Into the jaws of this promising mood calmly walked Miss Annabel Lee, the second member of the Gayland family to take up anew the duties of life that morning.

Mrs. Branstane's jaw tightened even more rigidly as she heard the daughter descending the stair, the tap of her slippers accenting the rhythm in her fortissimo delivery of a frivolous, and therefore popular, song of the day. By sound Miss Annabel Lee was in a highly blithe and satisfactory humour. Yet when, a second or two later, she appeared in the dining-room doorway in quest of a bite to eat, clad in some airy blue morning thing, little more than a dazzling blonde head perched at the apex of a blue flame, nothing could have deepened the dolour of her mien or the solemnity of her voice.

"Brannie," Miss Annabel asked, in the tone of one who inquires at what hour she is to be hanged; "where does Mrs. Father O'Brien live? . . . But Brannie!" Miss Annabel's tone shifted abruptly from extreme sadness to extreme severity, such was the shock of finding someone in the household at work. "What are you doing there! Why don't you have Berkeley do that? I declare, you are always treating yourself to the luxury of needless exertion. It's beautiful, such devotion. You treat our things as if they were your own. But surely" — Miss Annabel yawned — "at your age a woman is entitled to take things easy."

For answer Mrs. Branstane flashed upon Annabel a glance of X-ray penetration. Such was the quenchless spirit of mischief in the girl, it was never easy to distinguish, with even the most searching study, whether she really intended the sting that might sometimes, if one were so disposed, be felt in her speeches.

Whatever Mrs. Branstane distinguished in Annabel's remark, she might have distinguished in Annabel's person about five and a half feet of beautiful girl — lovely even in her fatigue and her deshabille. Her two slender arms stole out of the wide sleeves of her morning wrap, and disappeared behind her, where her hands were clasped. The masses of her waving light hair, tossed rather high that morning, fell away and exposed rather more than usual of her forehead. Of an identical shade of deep grey, no two pairs of eyes could have differed more than those of Annabel and Sylvia. Sylvia's eyes were always seeing something to admire; Annabel's were always seeing something to do. Annabel's mouth this morning was drawn down at its corners into a doleful droop that was absurdly difficult for its normally saucy curves. Her whole demeanour conveyed a sovereign severity. None but superlative beauty may safely assume such a supremely imperious air in this land of the free.

Not that any man would have resented it. But certainly Mrs. Branstane was in no mood to indulge the like.

She resented it in a silence that Miss Gayland herself felt obliged to terminate.

"Brannie," she burst forth, "you ought to be ashamed of such industry! It's perfectly heartless of you to set us such an example!"

And again there was silence.

Nothing daunted, Miss Gayland continued, — "I asked you, Brannie — perhaps you will remember" — she underlined the sarcasm with a languorous droop into one of the carved Jacobean chairs, and with a piteously bored glance toward the coffered ceiling — "I asked you where Mrs. Father O'Brien lives. Be-

cause" — she yawned again — "I am going to consult Mrs. Father O'Brien, on some ve-ery important business."

"I suppose," Mrs. Branstane snapped, the smoothness of her utterance broken by combined anger and industry, "I suppose you're going into a convent — again? That's it, is it?"

"Yes, ma'am, it 'is it'! Is Mrs. Father O'Brien a nice person, Brannie? Or perhaps the Rev. Mr. Wiggin could advise me. I know he would if he could!" Miss Gayland laughed. Even Mrs. Branstane was forced to an unwilling chuckle at that. "Oh, you needn't laugh, Brannie," Miss Gayland rebuked her. "Because I'm going to do it."

Being accustomed to Annabel's ingenious expressions of boredom, Mrs. Branstane was content to reply with a disdainful glance.

Suddenly Miss Gayland brightened. "No! I think I'll be a nurse! . . . Funny I never thought of that before. . . . At any rate I'm not going to college. I've had schooling enough. It's time I did something serious. Father can argue himself black in the face, for all the good it will do him."

"So! . . . Going to uplift the heathen again, are you? . . . Going to care for the downtrodden?"

"Why, Bran-nie! I declare, I don't care to hear you speak in that sarcastic manner. You even sneered at Mrs. Father O'Brien. You've always laughed whenever I've planned to do something for others. What has made you so cynical? . . . At any rate I don't see where you can have acquired the funny little spleen you've shown us of late. You've got it with you to-day again, I see. Just to keep up with you, I'll have to acquire a little of my own. I've always

wondered, anyway, Brannie" — Annabel laughed, for such was her wicked intention — "who bequeathed you that everlasting, ever-faithful old green dress you've affected for the last two years. And, oh, that reminds me, Brannie! When are you going to tell me all about that wonderful past of yours, that I've heard hinted ever since I've known you? Come on, now!" Miss Gayland leaned forward in her chair, rather cheered at the prospect of a bit of amusement. "Isn't it about time we heard all about the wonderful things *you* have done? . . . 'Eh'" she quoted, as an after-thought.

It is a highly remarkable trait in women, how, on suspecting the presence of a temporary buzz-saw in the mood of a fellow-being, they will carefully feel about till they have found it.

Quickly, angrily, Mrs. Branstane glanced up from her work. "You'll hear about that all in good time. But I'll tell you right now where the — the 'spleen' comes from, if you're so anxious to know!" Mrs. Branstane's voice trembled, whether from anger or self-pity, who knows. Perhaps it was both. "It comes from doing something 'for others' — and all my life long. And getting never a word of thanks, nor a real dollar of pay, nor a kind deed, in return for it all. That's where it comes from!"

"Oh! . . . So interesting!"

The missionary Miss Gayland had become a sudden statue to Scorn. The heathen were to be assisted, indeed, even liberally; but they needn't grow aggressive and upset the order of society. The statue tapped a neat small and pointed foot on the polished floor — just off the edge of a great Oriental rug, where the noise on the wood was most satisfying, or the

reverse, according as how you heard it. Through the open windows came an answering tattoo from the Claversons', where there was beating of a rug. From the Avenue in front drifted a faint rattle of traffic, and, from somewhere, the far-off melancholy whine of a hand-organ. In the room itself was silence, long-drawn, and laden with dolour.

"But oh, Brannie!" Miss Annabel soon and suddenly burst forth again, at another turn of the kaleidoscope character of girlish moods. "Didn't you think that everybody looked — oh — just ripping last night! *Every-body!*"

"I — I expect they did, my girl. I must say I — I saw very little of 'everybody'!"

"And — and didn't Julia Barlow loom up splendidly! But that freaky Isabel Warren in pale blue — forty, if she's a day! Did you only see her? She reminds me of a giraffe. She never fails to get herself up like a fright, and quote Fogazzaro, or somebody you've never heard of. I suppose she spells her name Isabelle! But wasn't Sherry Brookes so deliciously funny and silly! And — and Senator Banks was so — so — oh, I don't know what."

"Haven't I told you," Mrs. Branstane snapped, "that I saw nothing of your fine doings!"

"O-oh! . . . Is that all! I'm so relieved that you think so highly of — of our 'fine doings'!" And Annabel laughed, at the characteristic reaction of this simple creature to the elegant occurrence of the evening before.

"Well, I don't think, my dear girl, that there's any criticism coming to me — about green dresses, anyway — from a young lady who shows herself downstairs in the rig *you've* got on this morning!"

“Why, Brannie! There you go again! What’s the matter with you? . . . O-oh —” Annabel objected generally, to the inanimate things about her, since they alone promised her any measure of sympathy — “this life is killing me. Father won’t build me an asylum. He won’t even give me a new greenhouse. He won’t let me be a nurse, or a social reformer, or anything. I haven’t a single interest in life. Not one. If only something would condescend to happen in this howling desert! If only some wild romance would engulf me — something absolutely demoniac! Wouldn’t it,” she moaned, for such was the agony of her boredom, “wouldn’t it be daisy to be a cannibal queen! And have everybody bowing the knee to you! And slaves waving fans over you! And all the princes fighting for your hand, and reciting poetry, and — and all that!” Her fancy failed her, — and then revived again. “And they’d behave just precisely to your mood, or you’d order their heads chopped off. Or you’d have them eaten by the public, and that would make you so popular! There wouldn’t be any school any more, and no French composition. Because, you know, Brannie, I never saw anything like — like Mr. Penning last evening! He behaved outrageously. Never came near me the whole time — except for five little dances! And even then he was as glum as — O-oh —” A yawn. “How soon will breakfast be ready, Brannie? Have you tolled the bell?”

“The breakfast bell rang four hours ago, thank you!”

“Then I wasn’t much of a breakfast belle this morning, was I?”

Thoughtfully analyzed, you observe, Miss Annabel’s

craving to be a cannibal queen is easily translated into desire to hear speech of a certain male inhabitant of Rossacre, and go on hearing speech of him till Miss Annabel is saturated with the subject, and closes the discourse in a very grand manner, when she has had quite enough of it.

The one slight drawback is that Mrs. Branstane declines to be a party to any such arrangement.

It may be, of course, that Annabel is a little too vastly absorbed in her own concerns, but that is only because she has never heard discussion of very much else.

"Seems to me, Brannie," her babble runs along, "seems to me you are frigidly unfeeling this morning. You don't commiserate me one bit. Sometimes, Brannie, I don't quite know what to make of you."

"'Brannie!'" Mrs. Branstane looked up severely. It takes one arch-egoist to discover another. "Fine missionary you'd make! You never think of anybody but yourself. And I want you to understand that from this time on I don't intend to be called 'Brannie,' by you or anyone else."

"O-oh! Perhaps 'Araminta' would suit you better. At any rate, whoever you are, you're more out of sorts than ever — if that is possible, Brannie. Araminta, I beg your pardon! Allow me to say that persons whose hold of a comfortable situation depends upon their filling it nicely would do well to be discreet."

"My-y goodness!" Mrs. Branstane straightened up on her knees, rose majestically to her feet, and flung down her polishing cloth on the top of the table. The buzz-saw was nearer to being found. "A person can work their hands off, 'for others,' and get treated like a slave. My dear girl —"

"Brannie! What are you saying! This is becoming serious. What ails you?"

"What *ails* me? There it is! You treat me as if — well, as if I was some animal. And you've no call to talk to me like that. Calling me 'Brannie,' and all that. I've stood it long enough."

In the kindest tolerance Annabel beamed down upon her. "Woman, you are perfectly absurd. If you object to that, why didn't you say so long ago! Instead of nursing it in your heart. I like people to be outright with everything."

A lofty moral eminence, surely; but, sad to say, Annabel was not strong enough to hold it long. Something in her that was young and was Annabel urged her to add, still more loftily, "Besides, it's nothing to me. If you dislike 'Brannie,' we'll make it Araminta in earnest, then." And she laughed.

"There it is! That's how I'm repaid for all I've done for you," Mrs. Branstane fairly gasped, in the heat of her indignation. "Haven't I — well, fairly slaved for you, for all of you, as nobody else would, all my life long? Haven't I —"

Annabel interrupted with a fresh outburst of laughter.

"Well," Mrs. Branstane nearly shouted, in order to be heard above it, "who are you, anyway, that you can scold me as if I was some dumb brute! Here I am, put out of my regular work by your carryings-on into the night; and you can come here and nag at me into the bargain!"

After all this unromantic morning was furnishing a bit of amusement, and Annabel laughed on. "I'm so sorry that our 'carryings-on' are not to your taste! If you spoke to father about it, perhaps you might persuade him to mend the awful error of his ways."

"He'd just better mend the error of his ways!" Mrs. Branstane retorted, with more of her eternal sententiousness. "All right, my girl, laugh on. All the same, when there's anything to be done, you, and your father and your mother too, can always run to me for it, it seems. It's Nellie this, and Nellie that, till I'm sick and tired of it all, that's what I am!"

More merrily than ever laughed Annabel. Here, in this preposterous servitor, was, happily, a new source of entertainment. "But, my dear Brannie, that of course isn't what you're paid good money to do, is it! Or am I mistaken? You and Berkeley are too amusing. You've both come to think that you own this place. I suppose, one of these days, you'll be ordering us out, won't you?"

Redder than ever flowed the blood through Mrs. Branstone's cheeks, and at this new charge she fairly leaped. Always there were recurring these shocks to her sense of proprietorship in this world about her. A hot answer flew to her lips. "Well, my advice to you is —" But the sheer volume of what she had to say balked her powers of speech and reduced her to silence, and she flung herself down upon the floor again and viciously attacked the third leg of the table with her polishing cloth.

No act, no word of hers could have been more effective. Where a hot retort would only have moved the tormenting girl to be yet more annoying, this effort of self-control, of generous submission, quite overcame the truly generous Annabel.

"Oh, come! This is silly. It's all right, Brannie," said that tolerant and benign mistress, running to the window, but not without a forgiving pat to Mrs. Branstane as she passed her. "We all know how splendid

and faithful you have been. Don't think you haven't been appreciated in all these years. Only — let me tell you, so we'll understand each other better in the future — advice is not becoming in you."

In answer to that gentlest, if not most intelligent, admonition, Mrs. Branstane leaped once more to her feet. "In me!" she said.

Now the buzz-saw had been definitely discovered. The storm had burst.

"Me! My stars above!"

Where to begin Mrs. Branstane scarcely knew, so much she had upon her tongue. In the tension of her feelings it was difficult for her even to draw her breath. "Elegant missionary you'd make! Always ranting about the emptiness of your own life, and never once thinking that others may be more unhappy! Look at me! Do you suppose I enjoy being nothing but a servant? You have your dresses, your parties, everything you want. You do anything you like, go anywhere, see anyone you please. Everybody has to do something for you. Who does anything for me, I ask you? What can I even do for myself? Answer me that. And you fling it in my face that I'm nothing but a servant!"

"Why — really — Brannie —"

"You think you are climbing mighty high, don't you, and making yourself very important, treating me like a servant? Don't you? You never stop to think that even I may happen to have feelings too, and that it hurts me to have it flung in my face all the time that I'm nothing —"

"Oh, Brannie! Really, I never —"

"Nothing but a — a servant! Oh, no! Do you ever happen to think what I may happen to feel,

working my hands and knees to the bone here? For money! And being thought a servant! D'y'ever consider that?"

"Oh, Aunt Brannie, I never once thought —"

"Yes! You 'never once thought'! And yet you wonder where I get my 'funny little spleen of late'! The wonder is that I've held in as long as I have. Oh, yes" — Mrs. Branstane held up a staying hand — "I know what you want to say. It makes you open your eyes, don't it, your sort, when somebody shows you for the first time in your life that even *servants* have feelings, and that it hurts them to be where they are! And to be *shown* where they are! Then you pity them, and want to smooth them down. You'd feel the same way if Etta the cook came in here and had the nerve to speak up as I have. You'd feel sorry, and sweet, till you came to realize again that servants have got to be — that somebody's got to do the work. I know that myself. I'm not complaining of that. And servants can't do our work and sit in the parlour with us at the same time, can they? They can't be in our parties because they can't talk nicely. I know that too. That doesn't touch me. But did it ever occur to you, my fine lady" — Mrs. Branstane walked closer to Annabel — "did it ever occur to you, tell me — did you ever give it a thought — that perhaps I might belong where — where *you* are to-day? Did you? I say, did you?"

Mrs. Branstane paused, quite satisfied with the distinction she had drawn — the very difficult distinction between an American woman and an American mistress; and in her satisfaction she rested her hands upon her hips. Moreover, in this contest be-

tween herself and Annabel as to whose life trials were the important topic of discussion, Mrs. Branstane was conscious of having won.

"Oh, Auntie Bran!" Annabel was all blushes, all confusion. "Really, I *never* —"

"My dear little child!" Mrs. Branstane now beamed down from a dizzy height of moral superiority. "And what a child you are! You're bright, I know; but there are a good many things in this world yet for you to learn. Things that it would do you a great deal of good to learn. Did it ever occur to you that this style of work doesn't exactly fit me? Am I not fit for something a good deal better? It's plain enough, Lord knows! And yet *you*'ve never noticed it. See, now, how little you really think about others. And did you ever stop to think what could have brought me down to this? Did you?"

"Auntie, I sincerely beg your pardon!" Annabel's face was crimson under this heavy indictment.

Ten times over Mrs. Branstane had scored her point with the generous Annabel; but "Did you?" she pressed on — with the same instinct that in men makes great lawyers, great orators, or great bores. "Did you ever once think what I might have been before I got levelled down to this place? I say, did you?"

"Oh, Auntie!" Annabel had covered her burning face with her hands.

"And yet you think me a — a 'servant'!" Even in quotation marks Mrs. Branstane hesitated before the objectionable word. "You take on about the emptiness of your own life. Did you ever really notice mine? Who pays me any attention? What company do I have? I may be starving for company —

my own kind of company — *your* sort of company. And when I get lonesome — so lonesome that I want to die — and try to creep close to somebody like you — why, then I'm 'impudent,' I'm 'saucy,' I'm full of 'spleen,' I'm a — a 'servant'! What do I have to make my life anything but — well, what you see it now? And I guess you'd open your eyes if you knew what it was that brought me down!"

Ashamed, in any case, to have bandied words with the woman, Annabel was stirred to immediate apology, but that Mrs. Branstane had given her no opening for a single word — and meanwhile had given her so thumping much additional matter for apology that the girl was puzzled to know where on earth to begin. So it was that Annabel only ran and clapped her arms about Auntie Bran's neck, and fairly hopped up and down in the fervour of her penitence.

"Oh, Auntie, forgive me, forgive me!" cried the generous girl. "I never saw it that way before. I never once thought. And it was cruel of me! And idiotic! But we understand each other now, don't we, Auntie! And you forgive me! And do teach me to be better and more thoughtful, Auntie! You'll teach me, I know. And well you may teach me! Look at those flowers you've arranged on the table. And the pictures you've hung. This whole house is *your* work. You're a wonder!"

So the excited girl ran on. For she was young, and was ingenuous still, and open and frank. That is to say, she still gave way senselessly and freely to the best impulses that were in her. She still knew the world of utter propriety and policy so little that she dared to acknowledge her faults, and published them openly, cried them aloud at the top of her lung

power; and so played willingly the anvil to anybody's hammer. And so Miss Annabel was cordially assisted to play the anvil, and punish and scold herself to her heart's content. And neither one of them knew that Judge Gayland had stood outside the curtained doorway to the dining-room, and had heard every word that was said.

"E-eh, yes, my dear Annabel," Mrs. Branstane was saying, fairly drunk now, on this flow of apology and pity and praise. "You can run on, now, can't you, my girl, when you once have somebody to show you how really blind you have been. But I know you like a book. What will you do to make my life any different here?"

"Why, Auntie! I never thought —"

"Yes, you never thought of that, either, did you! But what is there here for me?"

"Oh, I'll have to see about that."

"Yes, how! Who notices me, if you please!"

"Oh, I mean it, Auntie. I heard the boys last night —"

There the Judge, sure now that he could command himself, put his head through the curtain and surprised them both, and frightened the younger woman into hiding her deshabelle in a corner behind the biggest possible chair.

"Heigho, my daughter!" he called, stepping into the room. He was wearing a jaunty morning suit of grey; a crimson carnation was in his button-hole; and his hands were at their eternal rubbing. "Heigho! What! It's twelve o'clock, and after, and you're up already? Well, well! Heigho, Nellie! And have you luncheon ready, Nellie? Where's Ida? Not up even yet? Well, well! Why, she's worse even than Anna-

bel! Annabel, aren't you going to slip upstairs right away and rig up for luncheon, there's a good little girl?"

For a moment he stood peeping and laughing at her, and then, playfully guarding his eyes with his hand, he walked over, drew from his waistcoat pocket a strip of the well-known green-engraved paper, and dangled it over the back of the chair that sheltered Annabel. "Poor, timid little dear!" he laughed. "I wonder if it wouldn't like this nice juicy wisp of hay? Hey? It usually does!"

"Oh, yes, Judge! And what do you think! She's going into a convent again," Mrs. Branstane interposed, never a comfortable witness to this constant court which the Judge paid to one who persisted in being the important personage in the household.

"No! Now is she! Why, Sister Agatha, you can't mean it!" "Sister Agatha" the Judge always termed his daughter at these seasons. "Now are you going into a convent — again!" he laughed on. "Well, well! But do have luncheon with us first, ere you forsake this wicked world for ever, there's a dear. And now, seriously, little girl, do run up and put on something that will please father. Now, run along."

And with her habitual "A-all right!" Miss Annabel dodged swiftly past him, slapping Mrs. Branstane playfully as she ran; and in a minute more she was pattering up the broad stair.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Annabel was at last well out of hearing Judge Gayland stepped close to his house-keeper. "My God!" he said.

He was pale, and he shook with anger, and perhaps with other emotions. Fear, among them.

"So you are beginning on Annabel next! I heard what you said from upstairs. You fairly shouted it."

With that he turned away toward the window, and put his hands to his face, and bowed forward, and sobbed.

"My poor girlie, my poor girlie! I might have known it would come!"

He turned again. "See here!" And again he walked close to Mrs. Branstane. "See here! You've given me — well, I shan't say anything at the way — at what's passed between you and me. But there's something I give you to understand. If you tackle me on the side of my daughter, you'll find me dangerous. Do you get that?"

The sudden spirit of the man fairly paralyzed Mrs. Branstane. For a moment she gazed at him — admired him — till the Judge spoke on.

"Yes, ma'am! I warn you that if you attack my daughter you'll find me dangerous!"

At that Mrs. Branstane laughed. The familiar Judge of old had returned.

"So?" she said. "'Well, well!'" And at once she began to bridle. Of all the rags that were red to Mrs. Branstane, the very reddest was "my daughter."

"So! Your daughter is to insult me whenever she pleases, is she? And I'm to be meek and take it, am I? Hadn't you better whisper your warnings to your elegant daughter, instead, my dear Ira?"

"My daughter shall say and do precisely what she pleases, and don't you forget that! Anything she pleases! Her place in this house is one thing, and yours is another. Don't forget that, either!"

"There it is! My-y goodness! Ho-ow many years, Ira Gayland, have I patiently, patiently taken everything you've seen fit to heap upon me! Answer me that!"

"Ho-ow" many times had Judge Gayland heard all that before! "O my conscience!" he groaned, and gestured his impotence, his despair, and the whole story of the years up to then.

"My conscience, indeed!" Mrs. Branstane caught him up. "To think of what I've been through on account of you! To think how you've kept me down — and when there was no need of it whatever. Why, only last night even the young boys noticed me. Raved about my eyes, my hair."

"Yes, they did!"

"They did just that. Your daughter said so."

So the ancient harangue was on again.

"And I warn *you*, my elegant Ira, that I'm tired of taking things off your wife and your elegant daughter. I know now where I stand. It's silly enough I've been to stand it as long as I have. And I don't guess they'd feel any too comfortable if —"

"Oh, here, here, Nellie!" The Judge leaped toward her. "Do let the girl alone, at all events. I'll give you anything. I'll give you everything. I'll give you a thousand dollars —"

"There it is! 'A thousand dollars'! You haven't got it to give. That's the trouble. Where are you ever going to wind up? You've given away altogether too many thousands of dollars. And I notice they've not been given to me! I really believe, Ira Gayland, you've been spending as you have all along just on purpose to cheat me out of my due. Out of what you've always promised me."

And so, as ever he had been before, the Judge was beaten down. "Yes, Nellie; yes, yes! I know, I know!" he tried to stem the torrent.

The Judge had learned his lesson. He had learned to watch for the pauses, and to heave into them quick solace and sympathy and flattery; and occasionally he was fortunate enough to divert Nellie's mind altogether.

"I know, Nellie, I know. It hasn't been a happy life for you. I admit it. I'm sorry — you know I'm sorry. At the — the way things have turned out. There, there!" And he held out a five-dollar bill, which she took; and went on with his chaffer.

"There! And now you're going down town and buy that pretty lace collar you've wanted so long, aren't you?"

And wouldn't Nellie get him his sherry right away? Wouldn't Nellie fix him his Spanish fried eggs for his luncheon, as only she alone knew how to prepare them — better even than the chef at the Club? Wouldn't she run upstairs and put on that adorable new dress that he thought so chic? And so, at last, the Judge was enabled to beat his characteristic retreat, "to run up and change his scarf at once, so as not to spoil Nellie's usual confection of a meal."

Judge Gayland had a theory that a difficulty, in

order to proceed, must have a victim to work upon, and that if the victim cleverly keeps out of the way; why, the difficulty is at least kept at a standstill. And in a moment his feet too were busy on the stair — quickened in the relief of escape.

So Judge Gayland dwelt day after day upon a powder magazine, hoping eternally that the explosion might never occur.

CHAPTER X

THE powder magazine was, of course, fashioned out of the Judge's own character. And for such a character the world is always lighting matches — for the most part innocently. But clever men, designing men, were not long in learning they could, with impunity, take advantage of poor Gayland.

The man in Senator Banks was above all that, but the politician in the Senator was not so inconvenienced by scruples. Of a certain Saturday, not long after the great Gayland ball, the Senator was having his bosom friend Penning to luncheon at his house, preparatory to a round of golf at The Country Club. In itself this was a circumstance highly suspicious. Ordinarily the Senator loathed the game of golf, except in the early morning, when no one was about to titter at his breathy drives. Yet here he was, about to brave the populous gallery of a Saturday afternoon. Even without this certain guide, Penning would have had no trouble in guessing the matter that lay on the Senator's mind, for his host gabbled like a magpie about every other topic under the sun. Even after the meal, when he was alone with Penning and all need of concealment was gone, the Senator preserved the same air of gleeful mystery — and the same propensity to talk nonsense. For example, as they left the house he glanced back at the highly castellated pile and demanded of Penning,

“Isn't it a beauty!”

Which it was not. Though it is due to the Senator to explain that he was proud of his house as a shrine of politics more than as a monument to architecture.

Somehow the thing had acquired the sobriquet of "The Incubator," in deference to the dark political plots presumed to have been hatched within it. To that very day the Senator remembered his almost apoplectic pleasure when a Philadelphia newspaper first applied the nickname, and poured editorial venom over that den of iniquity.

"Lord love you, Penning, what do you think of the day I've expressly ordered for us!" he chuckled as they took seats in the car purring quietly at the curb in front, and the Senator gave a destination that made his driver start.

From that point the Senator, if anything, increased his conversational output. It was clear that he was launched upon an elaborate masterpiece of tact and persuasion.

First he experimented upon Penning with a dash of the facetious.

"Didn't I have the devil's own time to find you this morning!" He imparted a distinct and knowing nudge to Penning's ribs. "No answer to the telephone. They tell me it's next to impossible to find you at your office at all any more. And I've also heard the reason." Another nudge. "I hear there's a house on the Avenue — not far from mine — brick — but with a sort of *lodestone* front — eh, Penning?" The third nudge. "There! I'll lay you a fiver you haven't heard a word I've said all through luncheon!"

"Yes — yes."

"That proves it! Look where your eyes are now. The ve-ry idea! Nice old innocent Penning! Always

swore he'd never, no, *never* —" There the little Senator went off into a peal designed to be the height of merriment, and slapped his friend with such power as his habitual awe of the man would permit him.

So he bravely plunged on with his campaign of laughing and chaffing Penning into a mood receptive to the somewhat explosive subject about to be broached.

On the ride to the club he talked and laughed till the crowds along the way stared in wonder. He chattered steadily as they shifted to golfing rig. And still he talked as Penning teed up for the first hole.

On their reaching the third green the Senator felt it safe to begin on the project that he had had in process of incubation — a perfect specimen, by the way, of the simple art of politics in Rossacre.

"Damn it, Penning!" the Senator there interrupted himself to say. "I do wish you felt like talking to-day!"

"H'm! Why not give me a chance?"

"Yes, I know; but, young feller, you've never once been altogether outspoken with me."

"But I often say 'Damn' in your presence — and quite often *at* you."

"Yes, I know; but now in all seriousness, Penning, you've never once — *you* know — unbosomed yourself. Except once. I forgot. Once, when you did drop a remark about your determination to 'land somewhere, sometime.' I've always remembered that. It startled me. It was such an admission from you. It was so — so definite!"

Penning laughed heartily, as well he might.

The truth is that Penning was inwardly roaring at the Senator's heavy exertions in tact, against his own

determination to baffle them. What the Senator meant to discuss, he knew perfectly well. And he intended to prevent it.

"Well, well, Banks!" He cleared his throat elaborately, and waggled his putter seventeen times in practice for a putt. "Fact is, I feel like talking to-day. Yes, really!" He tried for the three-foot putt, and missed it. "Fact is, I want to gabble. To somebody I can trust, that is."

"That's me!" The Senator himself prepared for a putt, and then straightened up without making it. And notwithstanding that they were holding up a long line of Saturday players, oathful at the delay, the Senator walked close to Penning and whispered, "I believe in my soul, Penning, that you and I were going to speak of the very same thing. Eh?" Another nudge. "About — about something that lies ve-ry close to your heart?"

"Ye-s," Penning parried. "My heart."

"That's it! The very thing! By heaven, Penning, I'm delighted. I've always wished you'd open up some time, and tell me something definite about your — your ambitions, you know. Your — your plans. Get me? I've never felt I could get really close to you until then. I've felt — I've been handicapped — It would be so much more comfortable — Damn it, I like you! I want you to get on. I've wanted to do my little part to help you on. Being an older man, and through the mill, so to say, I've wanted to steer you right. Do you see? I could have done so much before this, if only you had —"

"Fo-o-ore!" came the stentorian hint from some club champion, somewhere in the vicinity of the first tee. "What the devil do those two fools mean by

holding us up!" he complained to his opponent. "Who are they?"

"Shut up, or they'll hear you! That's Penning and Banks. You can't crowd those fellows aside. And — I — guess — there will be something doing in the little old town this fall! You don't see that pair together for nothing." . . .

"Lord, Banks," Penning is saying, "I wish I had long ago 'spoken out,' as you say. I might have saved myself years of —"

"Course you might! —"

"— doubt and — and so on. But it's one of the blemishes of my otherwise sunny and saintly disposition. I stand in my own shadow."

"You do! Now —"

"Fact is, when I think of the chances I *think* I —"

"Oh, don't be so modest, man! Now —"

"— might have had — chances of advancement, you know — it seems miraculous that I've reached the point where I am — where I *think* I am now."

"Oh, don't you bother about that. You've reached your 'point' all right."

"You really think so? Glad to hear you say that, Banks! By the way, what are those cranks yelling for, back at the clubhouse? Ah, yes! They want us to move on. Hurry up and putt out. Your hole."

A cheer went up from the waiting line as the Senator sank a four-inch shot and Penning replaced the flag — for the Senator would have no caddies by to overhear and repeat.

"Yes," Penning said, after they had driven, "I give you my word, Banks, I used to consider myself a hopeless case."

"Idiotic!"

"I thought I'd never succeed —"

"Silly!"

"— in this particular way, you understand. I've done well enough in the law. But I don't mind saying that — that —"

"Exactly!"

"— I've had other ambitions, too."

"Precisely! Just it!" The Senator was succeeding. His project was prospering. And he fairly danced as he walked after his ball. "Go on," he encouraged.

"Yes, I don't mind saying, Banks, that I've had my eye on — on other prizes. Only — the prizes never seemed to come my way."

"Oh!" — the Senator exulted — "you just let me take care of that! Think how young you are!"

"Thirty-four, Banks. Getting along. . . . But I will say that of late I have seen a little opening that —"

There Banks clipped Penning a resounding thwack between the shoulders. "You're on!" he fairly intoned his satisfaction.

"You don't think I'm too old?"

"You're too young! But say the word, and the job is yours."

"O-oh, hur-ree up!" they heard from the rear, and quickened their pace.

"You really think —"

"Say the word, I tell you, and she's yours! Gayland can't —"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Gayland!"

"I was only going to say that he was much older when he —"

"Oh, I don't see that Gayland cuts any figure in it at all. He —"

"What!" the Senator almost yelled. "You think that? Well, well! Penning, allow me to say, you've got real sense! I'm proud of you. I'm delighted with the way you take to my idea. I've had it in mind for you all along."

"Idea —?"

"Yes. To be frank with you, I was afraid you might raise a row over Gayland. More of your fine scruples, you know."

"Oh, Gayland's no saint, I know; but —"

"I should say he is not. Not entitled to any consideration whatever! Well! Now! Since you don't mind about Gayland, the thing is as good as done."

"Easy? Not a bit of it!"

"Let me tell you, boy, I know precisely what figure Gayland cuts in this district."

"You've asked him yourself?"

"Er — not exactly. The — the last expression I had from him was that he didn't think he'd stand for it."

"Stand for it! What objection can he have for me?"

Voice from a distance — "O-oh, get off the course!"

"Let's pick up, and wander over here under this tree"; Penning ventured to recall the ethics of golf. "I'd like to keep on with this subject." And they did as he suggested, to the wonderment of the passing players.

"How can Gayland object to you! My dear boy, he can't do it. I have some say on the case, I guess!"

"You? But, Banks! I can't let *you* interfere!"

"You leave that to me. We'll proceed in spite of him."

"No, I've got to do the whole thing myself."

"Don't care who does it, so long as it's done. I'll have the satisfaction of landing the man that I've always wanted to land there. But it's high time to be planning the campaign, my boy. You can't begin that too early."

"I — I have accomplished, I think, a — a little something." Penning blushed.

"You don't say so! Good!"

The Senator edged closer to his friend, whom he had feared to find restive, difficult, overloaded with scruple, and who was instead so gratifyingly sensible. It was time now to pass on to the practical details.

"No," he went on in a low voice, "I don't think Gayland can offer a particle of opposition. You've nothing to fear from him."

"I agree with you. But, Banks, it seems to me that we are leaving a rather important personage out of our calculations."

"I can't think who it can be, Penning."

"Only Miss Gayland herself!"

"Miss Gayland? What in the name of all that's holy has *she* got to do with it!"

Penning's amusement was no longer to be contained. "*Do with it?* Nothing, except that I haven't said a word to her about it yet!"

"About — about what?" The Senator's mystification was immense.

"Oh, about the thing I should rather naturally ask her."

The Senator sat up and challenged, "Will you kindly tell me what that girl has got to do with the Judgeship of this county?"

"Judgeship of — Banks, what the devil are you talking about!"

"What the devil are *you* talking about, young man!"

There Penning, laughing uproariously, permitted Banks to discover how he had been hooked and played on the line of Penning's superior subtlety.

At first the Senator was on the verge of tears in his anger and consternation. "Well!" he gasped, when he was calmed to the point of words. "I wish you luck with your friend Annabel. But what I want to know is, Will you run for the Judgeship of this county?"

"Against Gayland? H'm!" Penning pretended to ponder for a moment.

"Oh, he isn't going to run!" the Senator hurried to assist him to a conclusion.

"I understood that he would."

"He told me he wouldn't."

"He told me he would."

"Well, if he doesn't! — you'll — you'll run?" the Senator pleaded.

"I may run, if *he* doesn't."

"But — but supposing worse comes to worst, and the devil does run — you won't go back on me?"

Penning screwed up his eyes into a shrewd twinkle, and turned them like a pair of drills upon Banks.

"Tell you what, my friend, it would influence me a good deal if you — er — withdrew your objections to Sherry Brookes in your house. What do you say? 'Will you run?'"

It was the Senator's turn to ponder, sincerely. "Damn it, man, that's a hard bargain!" He turned his eyes away. They had acquired a sudden mist.

For at that moment it had become clear to the

Senator why his adored friend Penning had eased away in attentions to Sylvia that had always seemed to her father as inevitable and natural as Nature herself.

"It's a hard bargain," he repeated, with his head still turned away. "But, Penning, I want so much to see you in that job that I — I may agree to it. I won't say for sure, you understand. No, I won't say for sure!" . . .

In proportion as he had been talkative when they came to the club, the Senator was silent when they went away. Scarcely a word would he say.

"Where's Sylvia?" he demanded on entering his door at home.

And his daughter marvelled greatly at the fervour of his kissing her, and the still greater fervour of his dashing into his study and slamming the door.

CHAPTER XI

FOR half an hour the Senator raged up and down in the room which he dignified by the name of study and kept sacred to his business and political cogitations. Viciously he kicked aside rugs, kicked the unoffending coal fire in the open grate, kicked a path for himself through the heavy oak and leather chairs, and burst into violent conversation with himself, as a vent for his varied emotions.

"What a damn fool!" he said once, to the fire.

"What a wonderful fellow!" he said to the darkness gathering over the tennis court outside the rear window. Then, turning away again, "But such an ass! Why *is* a man such an ass!" he demanded of a bust of Washington on the marble mantel.

Once he cautiously peeped out the door. "H'm!" he growled as he closed it. "Sylvia's too good for any cuss who can't see Sylvia, that's all *I've* got to say!" . . .

"No, I *won't* have that rascal Brookes snooping about!" . . .

"We'll kill that off in a hurry!" . . .

"Oh, it's noble, I suppose!" . . .

"*No!*" The Senator came to a stop, nodding his head in sudden conviction. "No, *nothing's* noble that isn't sensible! . . . He'll come to see that himself, I believe." The Senator resumed his patrol. "Certainly he'll come to see that. When he finds I won't stand for Brookes, that may knock the hifalutin' nonsense out of his head. . . . *Provided* —" Again the

Senator came to an abrupt halt. "Provided he hasn't gone too far with the Gayland girl!" He glared about the room for some object that merited a kick. "If he *has* —! If — he — *has* —!"

For a moment the Senator stood there, his hands in his trouser pockets, jingling the keys and coin there, and pondered this matter.

"Well!" His jaws opened to emit the word, and then snapped shut again. The rest he sifted through his tightly set teeth. "No matter if he has or he hasn't, by Godfrey I'll make that man Judge in spite of Gayland. In spite of *himself*! . . . Yes, sir!" — he started his pace again — "I don't care what he thinks, or what he does, he's going to have that job. I'm not going to let any damned foolishness of his stand in the way of it. It's for the general good. The public interest demands it. (By ginger!" the Senator chuckled parenthetically, "I'm glad I thought of that. But it's true. It *is* a public demand. I'll *make* it one!) Thank goodness *that's* settled!"

There the Senator, having ignored two prior summons to dinner, condescended so far as a response to the third, and all through the meal puzzled his family with his mumbling and his complicated emotions. But especially with his chuckling.

It rather amused the Senator to think of the roar there would be in the town when he planted that bomb under Gayland.

It amused him also to think of Penning, under such weighty obligations, cutting any more son-in-law capers elsewhere.

Unfortunately the Senator's hopeful plans were not to fructify under the sunniest of circumstances. At

the very moment when he was plotting the elimination of Judge Gayland, for the general good, another man in Rossacre was plotting the elimination of the Senator himself, for a strictly private benefit. While he was planting his own bomb, this other was laying a mine beneath the Senator. And it is Rossacre history which one of them exploded first.

This was on a Saturday evening toward the close of September. The first patches in the gold and crimson garment of Autumn had begun to appear on the trees in The Avenue, though a few of the hardier crickets still chattered of summer, against the evidence of encroaching chill in the air. The moon, which had so thoughtfully timed its orbit to the Gayland ball, was addicted now to later hours and leaving the night to its thousand starry deputies, twinkling crisply in the cool and wind-swept sky. A saucy breeze filled the leaves with gossip and rumour. To breathe such air was to imbibe a heady wine. It was the season when Nature takes it on herself to see that the human animal is properly quickened from his summer sloth and dosed with her dozen and one stimulants to achievement.

The Senator felt it. And so did a resident of Argyll Street near by.

"All the same, Rica," this gentleman was remarking to his wife, "I'm going to land you on The Avenue, for all you try to throw everything in my way. I'm —"

"Oh, no, Walker. You just think so."

"I'm going to be the boss of this town — you and me — that's what. Lord knows, little girl, you may be living in the Gayland house itself, another year. Or right next door, get me?" He winked to his little

girl. "I tell you I'm going to be the big squeeze in this town. Just about next month, too."

"But, Walker, are you sure it's all right? Or else just think what people will say."

"Say?" Her husband glared down at her, his hands on his hips, under the coat that they pushed aside to rest there. "There you go again! 'Say'? Let 'em say! Say what they please. What'll it amount to? You can't," he waved a long forefinger oratorically — "You can't talk back very well to the man that owns you."

"Yes, Walker. But you know how all those men stick together. You know how they've kept us down as it is. And if you down them, those women will band together to keep me down longer yet. You know that for yourself."

"Oh, tut! There you go again! That's just like you, Rica. That's — now isn't that just the way you've always behaved? What encouragement, what sympathy have I *ever* got out of you, I'd like to know! Kept you down? Weren't we both at the Gaylands' ball the other night? Is that being kept down, I'd like to know?"

"We-ell, mebbby. Mebbby it's all right, Walker. I don't see yet how you're going to 'swing it,' as you say. Mebbby I don't understand, that's all."

"Oh, tut! Haven't I told it to you time and again? Where's your wits, woman? Well, I suppose I've got to go over it once more. It's all right, I tell you. It's all perfectly legitimate. They all do it. All the big fellows do it. Rockefeller, and Harriman, and all. Who knows, Rica!"

Again the speaker stood before his wife — as before a mirror, that he had married purposely to reflect a

perpetually smiling and approving reflection of himself.

"Who knows! Mebby we'll get too big for this little burg, and land in New York. How 'd you like Fifth Av'nue, for a change? Hey? Hey, little girl?"

Mr. Landis there chucked his wife under the chin.

"W-why, little girl, that's the way to grow big. They've all done it. These small fry in this village — these big toads in a little puddle — give me a pain. Bah!" Mr. Landis snapped his fingers. "Do it? Of *course* I'll do it! Listen here!"

He drew up a chair and sat down, to the comfortable duty of a lecture to his wife and an inventory to himself.

He was a lean and nervous man, with long fingers, and stubborn light-brown hair, and thin lips, and a long and pertinacious nose, and two grey and cunning eyes, a bit too closely placed together — rather in resemblance to the celebrated financier of his adoration. So he leaned back in his chair, and tipped his thin fingers, and studied the ceiling, and said, —

"Just see where we've got in, let's see — fifteen years. Just fifteen years, mind you! Here I am, president of a new hustling bank — my own bank — Walker P. Landis & Co. Yesterday I turned in twenty-five thou' in Steel Common alone. A mere side issue to me, Rica. Big fellows like me turn over these little trifles just for amusement. But could I have done that fifteen years ago? I guess not! Where was I? Where were you? Hostler on a farm. And you were a hired girl. Not that there's anything amiss about that. Banks was a bricklayer to begin with. And that isn't the only modest start in this

town, believe me. Oh, I know all there is to know about here. Got my own little private sources of information. They can't fool yours truly, you bet. But do you remember the way we started out? I got a job in little old Banks's coal office. We got married. 'Member our little house in Charles Street? 'Member that old ingrain carpet with the big roses in it, hey? 'Member that 'God bless our Home,' that you prayed in red wool on perforated cardboard, hey? And hung in the sitting-room? 'Member that old marble-topped centre-table in those days? And the chromos of George and Martha, hey? And the set of dishes with a green vine on, that we thought was so fine? 'Member the time when we hid that truck away in the garret, and bought a whole new outfit of oak? That was when I got to be secretary of old Banks's Sullivan County Lumber Co. And we got a lot of pictures of women and children listening to music, 'member those? And you wanted that book, 'Lorna Doin,' with the red leather binding, to put on the parlor table. 'Member that? And the big diamond ring I bought you, about that time? And we moved up here to Argyll Street, right off the Avenue? And I got you all these Chippendale furniture things, right up to snuff? Not old stuff, neither, but nice new pieces right out of the factory! And the day you were elected to the Woman's Club — 'Mrs. Erica Larsen Landis,' there it stood in the book, right along with Mrs. Wyeth, and Mrs. Warren, and Mrs. Wentworth, the real swells. Why, I was proud of you! Of course you made a few mistakes. 'Member the time you went to an afternoon tea in a low-neck dress, Rica? There, there, little girl, that was only natural! We all have to learn the hifalutin' way of doing things.

There, there! Look at the hand-paintings we've got on the wall now! Thirty of them!"

Mr. Landis patted the shoulder of his blushing wife.

"But here's the point. Just think — that was only a few years ago. Now look at us! If I want to, I can just about own this whole town! What do you think of that, Rica?"

Mrs. Erica Larsen Landis was a pretty woman of forty-four, with a plump figure, with two large blue eyes, an enviable mass of fluffy blonde hair, and a mouth that belonged on a heroine of polite fiction. Generally meek and submissive, there was a reserve of gentle, mulish scruple in her, and she never heard her farm-hand husband descant upon his progress but something in her argued against the methods of his rise. Neither was she above recollections of her midnight patching of his "pants" and socks, and other devotions, against his frequent hint, and occasional flat statement, that he had left her far behind him. Often enough the Landis household rang with the declaration that its lord and master passed therein as the least appreciated of all great men.

"Now listen, Rica, and try — *try* — to understand what I'm telling you," said lord and master condescended. "It's all simple enough. And it's all legitimate, remember that."

Mr. Landis moved to a more comfortable chair — rather he drew up the chair to a commanding position before his wife, and in it leaned forward in the direction of emphasis.

"It's simply this," he began. "Banks, and his crowd, have simply been kiting — in the Street Railway Company, and the Electric Light Company, affiliated. Know what that means? No matter. The

truth is, they've been paying dividends straight out of their capital. Now, all of a sudden, they need cash, to build a big extension through East Rossacre, demanded by the public. See? So what do they do? They borrow \$600,000 on two notes. But as a matter of form they get me to endorse 'em. And for security they turn over to me the property and live assets of both companies. The understanding being that when the notes come due and they've got to meet 'em — as they will, for Banks has mortgaged every living thing he's got to cover the deal — then, why, I'll calmly turn back the properties to them, and all will be as before. Just so. Well! The little point is — I'm not going to turn back the properties. I'm going to keep 'em!"

"But, Walker! Won't they *expect* 'em back?"

"Oh, bother! There you go again! What does it matter what they expect! It's close to a million in my pocket, I tell you!"

"But what will people say!"

Mr. Landis almost screamed it — "What does it matter what people '*say*'! If that isn't just like you! It's perfectly legitimate, I tell you. And what's more" — Mr. Landis leaned closer — "what's more, it's my *duty* to keep those properties. Listen to me. Am I fulfilling my duty, as a sound bank president and member of the community, in turning over the people's property to a bunch of bandits who handle it like that? Answer me that! Isn't it my bounden duty to keep those properties, in the interest of the public, me a man of brains and honesty, and run 'em in the interest of the public, the way they ought to be run? Answer me that, if you will!"

Mr. Landis leaned back in his chair, in sign of his

entire satisfaction with his own judgment. "I tell you, it's my *duty* to do it. Isn't Walker P. Landis a better man than Banks was ever born to be? I can make those properties pay more than he can — more to the stockholders, to the widows and orphans. And — of course — more to myself. To us, you and me, Rica. No man does anything for nothing, of course. And that isn't all."

Once more Mr. Landis leaned forward, now more in confidence than in declamation.

"Just listen to yours truly, Rica. I tell you, you don't know what a big husband you've got. There's the Wannamessett Manufacturing Co., making tin cans and sewing machines. It's in a hole. Well, I've been appointed by the stockholders a committee of one to value the property and buy it in for reorganisation. Well, there's another example of rotten management. Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to buy it in — for myself. I'll supply the reorganisation, and the proper management. What if Banks is interested in that, too. He *ought* to have it taken away from him. The property belongs not to him but to the widows and orphans. And I'm the man to run it for 'em. That's all I've got to say!"

"Yes, Walker. But — but what will become, then, of Senator Banks? And won't there be those that will say you've taken what belongs to them? Won't they say things about you?"

"Oh, my dear woman!" As Mr. Landis rose, his feet volunteered assistance in the expression of his impatience. He began pacing the floor. "'Say'! Let 'em 'say'! You don't begin to suspect what I know about Banks. And about Gayland. And all those high muck-a-mucks. I know every last thing about

'em. I know what *they* 've done, all right enough. I 've got my little system of finding out, you 'd better believe. They won't dare to say *anything*. Not those fellows, oh, no! Don't I tell you that all three of those properties are busted, the way they stand right now? I tell you I 'm the man to fetch 'em to life again. That fellow — what 's his name — Baer, wasn't it? — is right. There 's a few of us is born with brains to run things. We 're trustees. It 's up to us to step in and run everything for the general good. In a sort of way it 's the Lord's will. What if I do make a little in the transaction? That 's the Lord's will too. See?"

"Yes, Walker. Still — I suppose — Senator Banks will lose something. A great deal, won't he?"

"But what if he *does*, I ask you! What of it! It 's his own fault. Here are the widows and orphans, just calling to yours truly. And now see here, little girl." Once again Mr. Landis consented to be seated before his wife. "Let 's look at it this way. Let 's come down to brass tacks. Look what there is in it for us — for *you*, honey! You want an automobile, don't you? A limousine, mind you. And a shoffer. And a French maid. And trips to Europe. And a house on The Avenue. There won't be any Bankses and Gaylands, then, honey girl. It 'll be the Landises, and *their* balls, and *their* receptions, and all that. You 'll be the boss lady of the town, with your name in the papers, and all that. *And*, yours truly will just own this little burg, that 's about all. After that — who knows? — mebbby a branch office in Wall Street. D' you hear that? Mebbby a house in New York — on Fifth Avenue? What 'd you say to that, honey! Stranger things 've happened. Oh, you don't know

the schemes I've got in this little old head of mine, little girl! Haven't I always told you you never appreciated me?" And again Mr. Landis chucked his little girl under the chin. "I guess we've got somewhere already, haven't we? Well, that's only a beginning. Just wait and see where we come out!"

She smiled up at him — yes, proudly. After all, it might be that he knew a great deal more of the world than she. After all, her misgivings might be only the product of her ignorance. And those aristocrats on The Avenue *had* indeed treated her abominably. If there were other people of more brains, what right had those to complain if they were passed by!

Mrs. Landis rose and kissed her husband.

"Are you sure they *all* do it?" she asked. "Rockefeller, and all?"

"Oh, ho! They more than do it! By heavens, this little squirt of a village doesn't know what a man it's got in its midst, that's all I've got to say! And what a sweet little woman, too! I'm doing it all for you, Rica. Talk about your knights of old! I guess I'm one, eh?" . . .

Whatever Mr. Landis was, he was pleased with Mr. Landis. "Only one little thing missing, girlie. You know what. No little Walker Jr. tearing about the house. But there, there! Don't cry again. Mebby sometime — You never can tell. Eh?" He drew out his watch. "Now I'm going to take a little turn around the block, to get things just straight in my mind. Back in a jiffy. Three little weeks, and then the axe will fall. I want to make sure that I swing it just right, that's all. Remember, a limousine and a shoffer for my little lady! What? D'you hear me, little girl?"

With that Mr. Landis kissed his wife — was still kissing his hand to her as the front door closed after his retreating person.

And if she wondered that he donned an old coat and his oldest hat, she said nothing, being unaccustomed to dispute of his whims.

But the moment Mr. Landis was off his front piazza he turned up the collar of his coat, though it was not so blithering cold, and jammed down over his face the rim of his oldest and least familiar hat. And instead of strolling round the block he marched at a rapid pace out Argyll Street, across The Avenue, through the tunnel that carried Argyll Street under the railroad, and sought a small wooded park about a mile on the way to the hills on the rim of the town.

At the farther side of this park he turned to his left, skirting the trees for perhaps a block. There he paused, glanced cautiously about him, and uttered a low whistle.

In answer to his signal the veiled figure of a woman stepped forth from the shrubbery. And together they waded through the long, and now Autumn-withered, grass to a rustic bench and sat down together.

The shell of veiling and cloaking contained the source of Mr. Landis's reliable information — along with the well-rounded figure of Mrs. Nellie Branstane.

CHAPTER XII

NOT, of course, that these were the only matters “doing” in the little city. About these more picturesque incidents Rossacre wrapped its busy life, its seething activities, after the human and the Rossacre fashion.

“Found a sucker to buy your house after all, I hear!” Jackson will roughly chaffer his neighbour. Which is doing fairly well for a man under strict ban by a formidable wife for his additions to the business of the three excellent breweries of the town.

Other Jacksons with their wives throng the streets of evenings, or circle the brightly lighted Market Square, the merry open-air club of shop clerk or mill-hand, to observe what other Jacksons still may be abroad, and barter pleasantries with them, and above all note what they wear. At “The Old Corner” the deviled crabs continue to outdo anything that crabs have ever accomplished for Baltimore — though it takes more than deviled crabs to hedge and bound and cabin the multifarious tastes of Rossacre. The Movies invite the dimes and the presence of hundreds of swains, eager to impress their sweethearts. Two excellent and intensely rival brass bands seize upon every conceivable excuse to parade the streets or serenade political powers whose cause and whose cheque-book enjoy respect. The Oratorio Society has begun its new season of rehearsals for a perfectly recognisable version of “The Messiah.” The Rev. Arthur Wiggin has

called together again his large and devout club for the discovery of meanings in the works of Wells and Shaw never inserted there by their authors. Day after day the policeman on the corner widens his acquaintance and lengthens his belt. Much more sensitively Ross-acre vibrates to the rattle of its delivery wagons, thumping out the hard music of its thrift. Busily hum the mills.

And in much the same manner hummed the brain of Miss Annabel Gayland.

One day about then, when the Judge had reached home a little early for luncheon and had gone to his dressing-room to freshen his scarf, he answered a knock at his door to confront his daughter, awaiting him there in the gallery outside, her eyes brimming with mysterious mischief, her person informing the fluffy grey house gown that her father chiefly fancied.

"Come on, Dad!" Promptly she seizes him. "I'm bursting to show you this new step in the waltz. Now watch me. This way. See?"

In a minute they had compassed the length of the gallery, and the Judge had caught something of his daughter's hilarity, and fell to whistling the old-fashioned "Blue Alsatian Mountains," to keep their tempo the better.

Soon their feet and their spirits degenerated into burlesque, and they fell into a weird imitation of Mordkin and Pavlowa, till rugs and chairs were pushed awry and both of them were breathless from pent-up laughter and from heroic endeavour.

In a word, Miss Annabel's usual strategy of preparing her father for the shock of any unusual request would have prospered as of old but for the savage and untimely clangour of the luncheon bell below.

"Father, father!" Miss Annabel suddenly stopped, seeing how short was the time, and whispered, "Listen. I've something to tell you."

"Hush!" the Judge mimicked her mystery. "What can it be!"

"Don't laugh, father — please, please. I've been thinking —"

"Thinking! My stars, Sister Agatha! Thinking! Never again let me hear of your doing such a thing. It's so unlady-like. Ugh!" And he rolled his eyes.

"Hush, father. I'm in earnest. And it's something very solemn and sacred. I've just thought how I can be a missionary after all."

In earnest now on his own part, the Judge glanced at her sharply and his face clouded. "That again?" he asked wearily.

"But father, listen!" Miss Annabel artfully laid her head upon his shoulder, and fairly sang her words in the endeavour to lend them the utmost of seduction. "I can be a missionary right here at home!"

"Oh, really!" The father laughed aloud his relief. "I had no idea we were so bad as all that, daughter!"

"But," she ventured, looking up at him with everything she could command in the way of piteous beseeching, "I meant only to begin on Mrs. Branstane."

And to the surprise of his daughter the Judge once more fell away into laughter — of a vigour and a prolongation that quite perplexed her.

"You — you think Mrs. Branstane needs regeneration?" he explained himself at length.

"I'm not joking, father," Annabel rebuked him with her seriousness. "I want you to do something for me — to-day — and for me, you know."

"Yes, yes, daughter. After luncheon. We mustn't

keep them waiting." And the Judge started luncheonward. He was perplexed himself, and suspicious, and he studied Annabel narrowly. Besides, they heard Mrs. Branstane herself calling none too patiently — and what that signified the Judge knew well.

"No, no; wait, father. I want you to do something to make Mrs. Branstane's life more — more like ours. It does seem that we haven't been altogether fair to her. She's quite eager to improve herself. Now, wait, wait!" She plucked at his sleeve. "We're going to do something to help her, father; you and I together —"

The Judge did halt there, and looked his daughter over more carefully than ever. "Why, why! What's all this! You mustn't take her complaints too seriously."

Miss Annabel stamped her foot and bit her lip. "Oh, men are so provoking! Father, listen to me. You and I are going to make that woman's life more bearable, do you understand? I want you yourself to ask Mrs. Branstane to sit with us at the table at luncheon to-day. Will you?" She flung her arms about his neck and said into his handsome face, with all the might of her charm, "To please me?"

As for the Judge, he scarcely heard what she said, but stood entranced before the lovely picture of his daughter — until, finally, his mind slowly let in the idea she had offered it.

"Ira!" they heard Mrs. Gayland herself complain from below. She was always a bit jealous of this complete understanding between her daughter and her spouse. "Are you two *never* coming down to luncheon!"

"No!" the Judge almost shouted, till Annabel

tittered at the odd manner in which his answer to her had fallen upon the questioner below stairs.

The titter ceased suddenly, when the Judge turned from her with a jerk that was rough and petulant, and left her pained and surprised. And she followed him down and into the dining-room without more words. And in silence they disposed of a dismal meal.

For Mrs. Branstane's uses, Judge Gayland was fashioned to order. Unerringly, from among all the world's millions, such men and such women find each other. Or perhaps they become moulded to each other's purposes. Always Gayland had loved comfort, and long ago Mrs. Branstane had discovered the amusement of combat. Till then, for her own convenience, she had been content to bully him in secret; yet never since he had known her, and that was long ago, could he remember the woman when she did not represent to him a sort of fort of vitality, thrown up about the point of her mythical wrongs at his hands. Without the willingness, the strength, perhaps the wit, to fight her, the Judge had long before surrendered, and daily she had bullied him the more daringly.

Still, the Judge fared better than any other man would have fared against the same unhappy odds. He had learned to take refuge in the miracle of Distance, this grateful ability of one object in the landscape to be separate from every other. He had acquired a kind of cleverness in keeping between himself and Mrs. Branstane as many doors as possible. The very trait that had first fixed her upon him, now provided his best defence against her. He endured his plague as the neglectful endure a tooth that cries

for attention. His humours succeeded each other quickly; he had the blessing of a short memory; and the moment the tooth could be forgotten, he could forget that there is a future.

But here was a totally new attack, a new engine turned against him — his daughter's sympathies, her blind and impetuous generosity. Mrs. Branstane had enlisted it for herself. The Judge heard it from Annabel's own lips as she pleaded with him there in the hallway. His "pal," the comrade he had always counted upon to save him, was cleverly turned against him.

He wondered by what devilish ingenuity the thing had been accomplished.

Yet the trick had been simple enough. Till then, and through all the years of Annabel's girlhood, Mrs. Branstane had risked nothing from the Judge's daughter. Even yet she blushed to recall the merry remarks she had heard when, one day, twelve years of Annabel had peeped in at her open door and had surprised her making pretty faces in the mirror. Always Annabel was the first to confess her own faults; but she employed equal candour upon the failings of others, whenever their conceit annoyed her. Not for nothing had Mrs. Gayland herself thrown up her hands in consternation at a child able to look up from her very last spanking, to say,

"There, mother; that hurt beautifully. But now you 'll have to spank me again, because I 've lost *your* temper too."

Upon such a wit Mrs. Branstane had known better than to drum too hard, with any fabrication that would not stand a pretty severe test of good sense.

Then, suddenly, she had stumbled upon a great, a useful discovery.

Annabel, she scolded herself for not having perceived long before, was overwhelmingly generous — blindly generous, once her feelings were thoroughly aroused. Yet, in time, the discovery of this had occurred to Mrs. Branstane, on the morning after the ball, when she had first stirred Annabel's interest in the dull colours of her life.

So, with the happiest motive in the world, the Judge's only ally had gone over to the enemy.

CHAPTER XII.

EVEN Mrs. Gayland herself was equal to a discovery of her own then. For the time being, she was able to discern, an insidious element of decay had set in in her household. Never before had she been so shocked by this annoying propensity of one thing to lead to another.

Ordinary misfortunes, like the loss of a hair-pin or a quarter, she was wont to set down as movements of a baffling Providence — perhaps in punishment of a sinful thought, or a failure to drop enough into the collection plate of a Sunday. But now this very serious annoyance, this new impudence in her housekeeper, to keep Mrs. Gayland frowning and puzzled!

As, slowly, it had dawned upon her that she had been affronted by her handmaid, Mrs. Gayland had done much mumbling in the night watches. There would have to be a reckoning with Nellie, she decided; yet so far she had shrunk from the vulgar encounter, or else had not found quite the propitious occasion.

Moreover, even outside her house, Providence invented other and more elaborate means of chastisement for Mrs. Gayland. For one thing she observed, with acute suffering and inward searching, that her voice was not heard with the old respect in the councils of the D. A. R. At their last meeting they had the effrontery to reject her scheme of decorations for the next reception. A thing that had never happened before. In high dudgeon she came home with

the news, and when she let it out at the dinner-table that evening, Mrs. Branstane smiled and Judge Gayland received the blow with head devoutly bowed over his soup.

"Eh, ye-ess!" Mrs. Gayland sighed at his behaviour. "That's all the sympathy I get from you!"

Rather, the Judge extended to himself all the sympathy he felt. He knew the full portent of that stroke at his wife. It signified a subtle assault upon the social citadel so long and so impregvably held by the Gaylands in Rossacre.

Hardly had the gossips of the D. A. R. finished with this exquisite bit at the expense of their longtime social sovereign, when that poor lady was called upon by Providence to suffer a still more grievous injury. This new misfortune approached the dignity of a crash.

For long years Mrs. Gayland had been the informing spirit of the great and one Woman's Club of Rossacre. With a high devotion and impassioned industry they had consecrated themselves to the planting of more shade trees; they had annihilated want, and combated child labour — where they could find it — and held teas, and listened to innumerable lectures on City Planning, and Browning, and Municipal Government. Indeed this whole great — they called it movement — had been organised in the beginning at Mrs. Gayland's instance. But the great plague in this world is that young folk, with their fresh energy and newer ideas, are for ever coming on. Insidiously bright young women crept into the Club, under the very ægis of Mrs. Gayland — young women who knew New York and Chicago almost as well as they knew London and Paris, who could rip Botticelli up

the back, who not merely *knew* "the best people" everywhere but quickly considered themselves to *be* the best people wherever they were. And though for years Mrs. Gayland had pre-empted the presidency of this organization, as a right, as an acknowledgment due to her distinguished services in behalf of mankind, the time had come when the ladies secretly looked upon their quondam leader as a figurehead. A few of them had already begun to observe this to each other in whispers. Finally, and flatly, they came to regard her as an incubus outright. And one day the whole Club confirmed this fact, openly, and in the most dramatic manner.

The annual election of officers had for years followed a set routine, and the good ladies had come to dignify what would have been otherwise a dull formality with a reception, a lecture by someone of note, before this final world-stopping function of fitting the old head to an ever youthful body. The Gayland drawing-room, then the Gayland ball-room, having grown too small for the deliberations of the Club, they had taken their parleyings to permanent quarters at the City Hotel. And long was the line of motors, not without a few limousines and broughams, that fringed the curb in front of that popular haven on this last great day.

Into the rooms occupied by the Club — rather sumptuous, as Rossacre elegance goes — flocked the flower of the region, and made speech together — speech in the volume of a cataract. All the old lace and the new silk of the little city were open to review, along with all the top hats and tailed coats — some of the finery adorning even representatives from the second stratum of society, like the Landises, the Bemises, and

a few brainy teachers from the schools. The Rev. Arthur Wiggin had a civic as well as a personal pride in exhibiting on his arm the dark beauty of Miss Carolyn Hammond, authority on Latin in the High School. A hidden orchestra offered occasional interruption to the conversation. The dowagers laid on their heaviest majesty, the belles their maximum charm, and happiness was supreme. No less a figure than the Governor of the Commonwealth was to speak, after suitable introduction by the Hon. Andrew Penning, on the intimate machinery of our national political conventions.

And possibly it was because everybody was so concerned with himself or herself, or with some opposite in sex, that Miss Annabel Gayland and the gentleman whom she privately entitled His Shyness, became suddenly together and alone in the president's office — of perfect right, of course, to be shaded behind a jungle of enshrouding palms. At least Miss Annabel had wandered thither, somehow, in a reflective and explorative humour; and somehow Mr. Penning had followed her, in much the same humour.

"I — I happened to be passing the door, Miss Gayland," he fibbed wastefully. "And seeing you here I — thought I had better step in and see — see how you are."

"Oh," she answered. "How sympathetic. Do I look ill?"

"Oh, no! I —"

"Oh, you wished to see me — about something in particular?"

Miss Gayland's sweetly and eagerly parted lips, her wide-opened and scrupulously non-twinkling eyes, signified her readiness for the shock of any very gravest business anyone might submit. Miss Gayland said

nothing to Mr. Penning of having seen him, from her station behind the palms, pass and repass the door uncertainly and enter at last with a daring and resolute fling of his head. Being Miss Annabel, she demurely asked again,

“You wished to see me about something in particular?”

“Well, yes, — yes. I thought I — I really find you well to-day?”

Suddenly, by way of suitably employing themselves, they shook hands. As suddenly both of them burst into merry laughter, at themselves and at each other, and thenceforth dropped their shy pretenses.

Through a window opened against the stuffy air of the crowded rooms a meandering breeze stole in and brushed against Miss Annabel’s filmy skirts like an affectionate kitten, and pawed absurdly at the tails of Mr. Penning’s coat. Feathery clouds, merrily coloured leaves of Autumn, and many other properties of the outside world peeped in at the window. Quite unconscious of these prodigies of Nature, Miss Gayland and Mr. Penning spoke rather — it is possible that they spoke of a number of things. Things such as two beings commonly discuss, when they are young and are left together, without any serious prejudice against matrimony. Inevitably their concern will be fixed upon the superior merits of the Baldwin apple, or the excellent preserves put up by one’s grandmother. Mr. Penning may go so far as to remark upon one preserved peach open to his observation. Young men are inclined to be venturesome.

In fact Mr. Penning ventured farther. Rummaging with his eyes the spectacle before him he abruptly exclaimed,

"I say, Miss Annabel, there is such a striking thing about you, I find!"

"So?"

"Yes — yes. You — you are so tremendously a girl!"

"That," says Miss Annabel gravely, "is something very serious. But there's a thing I've often noticed in men."

"That is —?"

"They've got such a lot of human nature."

"Oh, no! That all belongs to the lepidoptera!"

"The what?"

"The butterflies," Penning laughs like a schoolboy, — as well he may.

"Disgraceful! I suppose you mean that to be a cut at girls."

"Oh, oh, I —"

"And I thought you were above such a common attitude, Penning — *Mr.* Penning. I'm so disappointed. I've gathered that you are very deceiving to young women."

"Oh, oh, I —"

"Last year, when Charlotte Wood was married, you sent her a copy of 'Paradise Lost.' What does that mean, I wonder?"

Whatever the meaning of these two it was not in their words but in their behaviour. For insensibly they had moved closer, and now stood so near together that their faces all but touched. Rossacre surged past a not very distant door and may have been perfectly aware of that fact of their nearness — more aware of it than Miss Gayland and Mr. Penning themselves. That lady and gentleman were absorbed instead in angling exquisite significances from this empty badi-

nage; they toyed with the veriest commonplaces, about the weather, about anything, and filled them with the subtlest meanings; they bandied callow innuendos, of the most delicate and delightful import. In a word, they were stating the fact of interest in each other, in the elaborate circumlocutions enforced by the conditions of this century of sense and science. Lord knows, they may even have fallen to perfectly sensible discourse, fit for any third person to hear. Once, at any rate, they turned toward the window in silence, for there was expressive communion now in the dumb physical nearness of their two persons. Finally something of the characteristic Annabel spoke out, for it was never long suppressed: —

“You look tired, Penning.” And this time, it is notable, she forgets to add the Mr. “Can anything be amiss with you?”

That was the charm of Annabel — apart from her personal loveliness. In spite of the serious business of being herself, the interests outside were always sure of her notice.

For answer Penning touched on something that he had never before mentioned to another. He said he was worried about his work. And even made effort to explain the point in a case that puzzled him.

Quite aware of the distinction in her favour, Annabel listened with avidity.

“Do you know,” she said, thinking for a moment or two after he had finished, “it must be anything but cheering to see people always fighting, always on their mean side.” She was calmly taking possession of his confidence then, where none had succeeded before. “It can’t be very amusing to be a lawyer.”

"He looks on at a squirming of worms," Penning confessed, wearily because naturally at last.

Then he laughed. It occurred to him for the first time that he was not talking to a silly girl. "I often wonder that the immortal angels of heaven don't die a natural death of laughter, looking down at the spectacle of mighty Man! The wrongs he does do himself! Seems as if the Maker of this little world had gone away and left it in charge of an office-boy. Looking about you here, doesn't it make you grin? Why do we tolerate any distinctions besides qualities of heart and brain?"

He was beyond her, but she loved to listen — and showed that she did.

The encouragement in her eyes, new to him, was irresistible. So he prated on — not much more successfully than any other who has tried to confine the world to words.

"I believe I know why we have other distinctions — like these about us. I'm afraid it's because we have women — and *their* human nature. There's such a thing as 'society' because there are mothers with daughters. It's a marriage mart. A girl is 'introduced to society' — an announcement that she is For Marriage. Then barriers are put up, so that only the most select need apply. And the women do it." He laughed down at her gently. "And do you know why there's such a thing as war? It's because men get periodically weary of this terrible tyranny of manners; they get seized with a fever for the free life of the camp, where they can live as they please, and like and dislike as they please, without this eternal dictation from policy. . . .

"Good Lord!" he broke off, "how I do preach!"

"But," said Annabel, "it's just what I think!"

"Ah!" the compliment made him beam, "that makes it important."

"Yes, but I never thought it till now!" she confessed, and was eager to go on, but that something played tricks with her voice, and she did not then finish her rapture. For, everything else with them merging as it did, the inconsequential merging of their physical presences accomplished itself without their knowing; and once more in the history of the world the universe dropped away and became nothing but the touch of two pairs of lips. And straightway words deserted these two, for love has said nothing until it has gone dumb.

The defective world brought itself back to them in time, through the agency of Annabel's sense of humour.

With a twinkling eye she looked up at him and said, "Mercy, but this is good and sudden, isn't it? But — of course I can't answer for you — but — but I'm not very good at waiting. I like immediate results. And I saw that you — you needed guidance and prayer. And — and really I could have given you an awful chase; only —" She hid her furious blushes on his shoulder again, and there mumbled the rest, "— only, I was so deathly afraid — you — you wouldn't follow!"

Penning spoke eloquently with his arms.

It is quite probable that Mr. Penning and Miss Gayland took this to be a very grand moment indeed, very different from anything that had ever happened, to anybody on earth, before. And they remained in this interesting attitude until Miss Annabel very suddenly and very violently tore away from Mr. Penning,

and flew to embrace Mrs. Helen Branstane, who then appeared in the doorway, and whose face published the natural sentiments of one woman toward another caught in the sugary beginnings of mortal love.

"Come, Penning!" Annabel implored, when her confusion had subsided to the point of speech. "I want to present you to a new and dear friend of mine, Mrs. Branstane. *You'll* know how to appreciate her. You've seen her often enough at our house, Penning; but you've never really known her. And from now on I want you two to be the very best of friends — *my* two best pals. Do you hear?"

Wondering what new caprice had settled upon Annabel, Penning made the woman his best bow, albeit with a flavour of amusement that proclaimed him a fixed part of the world he condemned.

"And now, Auntie," Annabel cried, when this was accomplished, "run along; because Penning and I want to talk about you. And," she added archly, "you may think whatever you please about me!"

Mrs. Branstane turned away, a smile of utter knowing on her visage; and Annabel ran and shook Penning's shoulder, or as much of it as she could grasp.

"You — you worse than a hypocrite! You politician! You can preach. You can sob over the slums, and then snub Auntie Branstane! That is laughing at *me*, young man. Now, listen. It isn't as you suppose. I'm not a silly, sentimentalizing girl. I've made a simple discovery, Penning, Sit down. I want to tell you."

She sat down at the presidential desk, and pointed Penning to the chair stationed for the president's caller. Obediently he sat down.

"Listen, Penning. I know I wasn't born to make

the world over again. At the same time I'd be a worthless ruin if I didn't do the simple things. You know what I mean, even if this does sound silly. You know we treat lots of people as if they were horses. There's Brannie. I've never been decent to her. Just treated her like a horse. There she's been, right beside me nearly all my life; and I've never done a single thing to help her along in the world. And really, there's a lot to the woman. I'm certainly not going to treat her as a servant any more. The other day she gave me an insight into her life. Why, it was like looking into another world. Not a bright world either. *She's* bright enough. Don't you let me catch you being rude to her again!" Miss Annabel shook a small fist, which Penning quickly caught and kissed. "She's the equal of anybody in this small town, let me tell you. She has taste, and ideas, and a lot of things. And I'm going to see that the town finds it out, so there!"

In a word, Rossacre had nothing to offer that should not be humbly and immediately at the disposal of Brannie before that winter was ended. Miss Annabel even wished that Rossacre might rebel to a certain extent, that she might have the satisfaction of showing that it was dealing with Miss Annabel Gayland, forsooth!

Penning sat back and admired the girl as she delivered herself of these impotent manifestos. That is to say, he admired the flushed cheek, the tossed hair, the pretty frown of determination, the stamping of Miss Annabel's slim foot on the floor. And while he admired he wondered what blow of disillusionment might fall upon the girl when she came to meet the mulish prejudices she was certain to encounter.

He wondered especially what mischief might not follow these angel intentions and efforts. Things that the boys at The Club had to say of Mrs. Branstane came back to him. He could read the story of imposition that the woman had probably foisted on the innocent, credulous, generous girl. It was on the tip of his tongue to warn her of the mischievous consequences that follow upon the best of endeavours wasted in the wrong quarter. But the pretty vision of altruism she presented, reinforced by the vision of her person, stayed the impulse.

It was, moreover, time to assemble the great meeting; time to hear the president's address of welcome — written by her husband the Judge — and to hark to the learned Governor. And the voice of Penning, as he introduced the great man, had a ring, and his wit a scintillation, that astonished his oldest acquaintances.

All that being finished, came the election of officers — behind closed doors, as a matter of course, after most of the guests had departed. A mere formality, as it had always been. Only, Mrs. Gayland, to her utter stupefaction, so that she scarcely knew she was alive upon earth, was defeated for the presidency.

That bright, though essentially pushing, Mrs. Bemis was chosen instead.

It was all over, quietly and definitely, like the snap of a finger; so soon that the members themselves were scarcely aware of it; so soon that a few remaining guests heard of it. The dozen or more of them gasped at the news, and flew away to corners of parlours — of drawing-rooms, where they existed — where it was safe to prate of what had befallen.

Thoughtfully Annabel and Penning sauntered away on foot. "Poor mother!" was all that occurred to Annabel's tongue.

In some fashion Mrs. Gayland got into her motor with her lieutenant, and they drove home — Mrs. Branstane to seek the kitchen, and titter, and convey the tidings to the servants; Mrs. Gayland to seek her couch and moan.

"Eh, what have I done, to be so mortified! Ira, where are you? Eh, there's always sump-thing. You're never about to sympathize."

But the Judge had stolen away, to make a secret of his own humiliation.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

SO the days faltered past, escorting Autumn in her myriad guises — to the old bringing a subtle melancholy, a hinting of the final Autumn; to the young more seasons of hunting and of teas and dancing; to the Rev. Arthur Wiggin bringing inspiration for a poem which he courteously offered to the public prints, and from which the foregoing beautiful thoughts are pilfered.

To the "boys" that Autumn brought a complicated emotion which one of them translated in the sorrowful reflection that, —

"The town hasn't seemed the same since Sherry Brookes went on the water-wagon."

To Mrs. Branstane Autumn hinted of hushed preparations for the budding of a new life, and the burial of the old one.

Immediately on the afternoon of Mrs. Gayland's historic discomfiture the emotions of Mrs. Branstane required an outlet, which they curiously found in the kitchen.

For all that Brannie had won over Miss Annabel with a tearful recital of her various circumvallations in the kitchen, the kitchen was nevertheless, one might say, the gymnasium where she nursed her strength. It served and it gratified many of her instincts — her love of supremacy, the joy of beaming down upon those who feared her, the delight of having about her minds that she might impress. Tirelessly she bored Berkeley and Etta with tales of her one-

time grandeur and of the money that her father was worth. Darkly she alluded to the dramatic episode which had reduced her to the menial estate. But oftenest of all she referred to the twenty thousand dollars which she was one day to inherit.

Servants, as all employers of domestic labour know, will be servants; which is to say that now and again Jonathan took out the horses and the Stanhope for a quiet drive with Miss McGuinness what was cook at the Claversons'; now and again Berkeley broke a piece of glass or china — and these things, such as she detected, Mrs. Branstane held over their heads like a doom, and exacted of the culprits whatever she liked in the way of personal service. When this failed she kept them under her thumb by means of small loans. In fine, they were slaves to her will, cheated of their full earnings, and yet unable to give notice and leave by reason of their endless obligations to her.

There was even a touch of jealousy in her persecution. Never had Mrs. Branstane reconciled herself to the fact that Etta the cook and Berkeley the butler had been hired primarily for their talents at entertainment, for such was the taste of Judge Gayland in his servants. It was rather incidental than otherwise that Berkeley had turned out an uncommon fine man about the dining-room, and Etta a superlative cook. Berkeley was a bona fide Briton whom the Judge had captured ten years before in Philadelphia and had brought home as a rare find, chiefly for the rich Midland dialect that he spoke, or affected, when he discovered how it caught on with the genial and generous Judge. 'Enson he gave as his name, which the Judge promptly translated into Berkeley, and elegantly pro-

nounced as Barclay. Etta, a nondescript, had won her billet in the main on account of the malleability of her name. Originally she said it had been Etienne Joliebriand, in which the Judge had seen at once a more picturesque Humphrietta Jellybread, and hired her accordingly. And they received almost the wages of Mrs. Branstane.

Hence it was that, in the kitchen, Mrs. Branstane was driven back more and more upon her mythical inheritance. Beyond the kitchen door she lived in the future; beside the sink she lived in the past. And endlessly she bored them. Often, when she was unable to tease or tempt or invite Etta or Betty or Delphine to her room, she would, in lieu of any other expedient, order them there, for the sake of having an audience in these reviews of her former magnificence. When they found some excuse beyond even her orders, such as tasks set them by Miss Annabel or Mrs. Gayland, Mrs. Branstane would visit them in their own rooms, and help them there with what "tasks" they were clever enough to trump up for the occasion. Certainly she imposed upon their good nature, and bullied them, until at last even they came to understand her and manipulate her. Learned how to throw out sops to her inordinate vanity.

"And is yer fayther that near to his grave then?" Etta would say.

"Etta!"

"Yazzum, yazzum! Beggin' yer pardon, mum, and no offense intended!"

And then Berkeley: — "'Twill be a fine mansion, that it will, mum, when it comes into the hands of yer worship, mum. That I've said many a time, mum. Haven't I, Etta?"

"That ye have, Mr. Barclay! And haven't I said as much?"

"We-ell, who knows?" Mrs. Branstane would approve. "It's quite possible that things may happen here. If I should keep on, it may not be always as I am. Indeed, I often wonder that I've bothered to be here so long — that is, as I am now."

"So I've often said to Etta, mum. It's no place for the likes of yew, mum. You as ought to be the 'ead of the 'ouse, mum."

These things Mrs. Branstane enjoyed, as any artist revels in the exercise of his powers. What matter that, the moment she had departed from the scene, Etta would giggle,

"Now, ain't she the beauty!" and stuff her apron into her mouth to stifle the laughter that might bring back Mrs. Branstane and retribution.

"Beauty she is!" Berkeley would assent, when Mrs. Branstane's step had retreated to a safe distance. "Han' that old green dress o' her'n! I wonder that her grandmother didn't will her something on the brown, too!"

"And her fayther worth his twinty thousand!" . . .

For all that, Mrs. Branstane's father had obliged his daughter with his death at last, not forgetting to will her quietly his twenty thousand. Hence it was that Mrs. Branstane now paraded about the Gayland house the bearer of a fixed and placid smile. Closer than ever to the ruddy verged her plump cheeks. More pointedly than ever she conveyed the impression of exuberant health. Half of her forty-two years seemed to fall away from her. Her speech took on a note of conscious elegance. Something of

a jaunty and sportive spirit crept into her tread. Mrs. Branstane was on the upward stair.

So much so that Miss Annabel herself promptly remarked it — and naturally ascribed it to the woman's satisfaction at this new prospect of life laid before her by Miss Annabel.

"Guess we 're not a bit happy these days, are we!" she said to Mrs. Branstane, twining an arm about her waist. "Guess we aren't getting on a bit, are we!"

"You are a dear girl, Annabel," Mrs. Branstane granted, though with an air of condescension that Annabel generously set down to the awkwardness of a beginner at social usages.

What Judge Gayland, had he heard that colloquy, would have suffered may be imagined. The power that he feared might "begin" on Annabel his daughter had made a fast friend!

And the two new friends were the only members of the Gayland household able to muster a smile in those days — Annabel because smiling was a necessary condition to her existence, and Mrs. Branstane for a good reason already set forth. The others went about their daily business without that facial luxury. For scarcely had that dread bolt of the Club election struck at Mrs. Gayland, when her mansion shook under another proof of this hideous propensity of one thing to lead to another.

This was when they were all treated to the calamity of an unsolicited call.

On a Saturday afternoon, long after the period appropriate to a call responsive to an invitation to the Gayland dance, and at an awkward moment when the Judge and Mrs. Gayland were preparing them-

selves against their regular Saturday afternoon drive, the bell at the front door rang.

At sound of it four frowns were frowned by the three Gaylands and by Mrs. Branstane.

From the door of her dressing-room Annabel whispered, "For mercy's sake, mother, who can it be? An agent?"

"Now, what can that person want!" Mrs. Gayland moaned in her "boodeer," as she called it. "E-eh, there's always sump-thing!"

Hurriedly, and none too patiently, Berkeley flung down the flannel cloth he was lazily applying to the silver for dinner, drew on a fresh white coat, sought his tray in the pantry, and — leisurely — answered the bell.

Leaning cautiously out of their several doors fronting the gallery above, the three Gaylands overheard the conference below.

"Is Mrs. Gayland to home?"

"She is, madam."

"I desire to call."

Even Mrs. Branstane, from her door on the floor above, had overheard and joined her titter, even as she had joined her frown, to the general sentiment of the household. Mrs. Branstane, by the way, would have been found, if anyone had noticed, in a brand-new gauzy white deshabelle, purchased only the day before.

In a moment, through the agency of Delphine, Berkeley had delivered the card of Mrs. Walker P. Landis, and the three Gaylands fell to excited whispers.

"Now what does *that* woman want!" said Mrs. Gayland.

"Tell her we don't need any more soap just now," said naughty Miss Annabel.

The Judge, early home for his Saturday amusement with his nervous high-steppers, and with still more nervous Mrs. Gayland, left off his shaving and poked through the curtained doorway of his dressing-room a countenance doubly comic in its lather and its amazement.

"Who is it, Ida?"

"O-oh, it's that Mrs. Landis."

"Is it?"

Not two words, nor two million, could convey the exquisite sorrow of the Judge at that bit of information.

"Yess, it is! And it's so provoking!"

To Mrs. Gayland the prospect of interesting a complete stranger in the phenomena of life was appalling enough in itself. What was worse, even she could perceive in this intrusion a subtle assault from a crass outsider upon the social citadel of Rossacre. And once more Mrs. Gayland pronounced, "E-eh, there's always sump-thing in this world!" and sank into a chair prostrated before this sudden necessity for thought and decision. "What is a person to do!"

"Do? Confound Mrs. Landis! Tell her to go to the devil. Tell her we're engaged. Jonathan's ready with the horses right now."

"O-oh," — Mrs. Gayland's eyes and hands all sought the ceiling — "I suppose we'll have to be nice to her now — now that she's *here*. Otherwise she'll talk about us. But what do you suppose she wants? I thought we were rid of her. She's never troubled us before. It all comes of your asking that Landis man to the dance, Ira. I warned you of what would happen."

"Well," the Judge cut in, "where's Annabel?"

Always, in time of trouble, Annabel was his very present help.

Hence it was that Delphine was dispatched to quicken Annabel at her toilette, and Mrs. Branstane was required for Mrs. Gayland; and the household, like an oyster, did its best to make a pearl of this intruder.

The tax on their good nature was severe upon all of them, but heaviest of all upon the Judge himself. An unhappy — because a reflective — afternoon was that for him. All the earthly ills that it had always cost him dearly to forget, were ushered in afresh by that woman's ring at his door. He was almost as long at his toilet as Annabel at her own. And they issued from their doors, on opposite sides of the gallery, together.

"Oho!" sang the girl at sight of him, and pointed an accusing if filial finger. "You purposely dawdled through your prinking, till you thought the caller might be gone!"

There was a swift patter of feet round the "forty yard dash," or the "Y. M. C. A. gymnasium," as Annabel playfully designated that gallery. At the end of the pretty sprint there occurred a kiss.

"Father, I caught you. There was a sad look on your face when you came out of your door. You —"

"Nonsense, daughter!"

"You thought you had got rid of it so cleverly. But —"

"Nonsensel!"

"— I saw it!"

"Foll-loll!"

"Now, don't contradict!" Here the feminine speaker held a feminine hand over a mumbling

masculine mouth. "Tell me, father, aren't you well? You've looked so weary, and worried, of late. You used to be so sweet and plump." She pinched his cheeks. "And your lovely hair — that I want so much for my own! —" She lifted a tuft of it — "is getting a — a little thin." In sad reproach Annabel wagged her head. "Tell me, Daddy, aren't you — aren't you happy?"

"Little goose! Of course not! How can I be happy when my drive is all spoiled! It's all —"

"No, you're not all right, Judge Gayland. It wasn't a frown on your face, but a *sad* look. You've not been in your old high spirits for — oh, ever so long. Nobody in this house has been. Mother looks worn, and the servants are perfect dragons — except poor, patient Auntie Bran, poor thing."

"Oh, fiddle-sticks!"

"I know what's the matter! You are over-worked! 'that's what's the matter of you.'" Annabel quoted.

"Yes!" And the Judge surprised her with the bitter note in his gale of laughter. "Yes, I am — I have been rather *over-worked!*"

"Well, you needn't accuse me!" Another kiss was recorded in Gayland history. "But anyway, whatever you meant, I'll forgive you — provided you promise me that you'll stop work for a while, father?"

"Oh, no; it's im —"

"No, it's not impossible. Trot us all down to Palm Beach for a month! Promise me, anyway, that you'll go. Resign your old Drudgeship. You've had it long enough — just ten years. What does a big man like my Daddy want of a little toy like that! It's no honour now — not to the likes of you!"

There, however, since it was high time they de-

scended, the suasion ceased, without having come to Annabel's desired conclusion. At the bottom of the stair Miss Annabel's blue-grey eyes opened widely in surprise at another visitor, of her own — for all his earthly riding costume a heavenly visitor to her, who had proved already his heavenly descent by the patience of his half-hour wait for Miss Annabel's company on a canter over the late September hills. There, at the bottom of the stair, in the wide hall, was more banter and laughter; and then the Judge, very archly, and with elaborate ostentation, left his daughter and her visitor together, and himself withdrew.

Gingerly skirting the drawing-room, though perilously close to it and its human content of his wife and her caller, the Judge overheard a bit of the issues there under discussion. By then Mrs. Landis had long passed the official errand of her appearance, which was to announce to the chairwoman of the Ladies' Aid Society of St. Mark's parish church the sensational discovery of vermin in no less a place than the sacred edifice itself!

"So that's what they are wearing now?" The Judge recognised the voice of his faithful spouse. And to his infinite disgust it was amiable and animated.

"Oh, everything this Fall is big and tilted. You know, I've just been down to New York and I'm supposed to know. Everything at Wanamaker's is big and tilted. Landis just dotes on this year's hats!"

"Damn Landis! And damn hats!" the Judge growled to himself, and tiptoed through the library to the dining-room, noiselessly closing behind him the heavy hangings.

In the dining-room he was startled, and by no means overjoyed, to come upon Mrs. Branstane at her early evening business of laying out the silver for dinner.

"Well, sir!" she greeted him grimly. "I suppose you know what *that* means!" With a fork poised in her hand she pointed to the drawing-room adjacent, and spoke in the drawl that always portended in her the mood of battle.

The Judge grimaced, by way of acknowledging the observation.

"I have no time myself for that freak in there!" Again Mrs. Branstane jerked, this time her head, in the direction of the drawing-room. As for the Judge, he leaned helplessly against the wainscot and steeled himself to listen, sith escape was impossible. And Mrs. Branstane continued. Always it gave Mrs. Barnstane acute pleasure to continue. "That woman reminds me of a sparrow, with her eternal twitter. Only a sparrow is more grammatical. . . . She says she only dropped in for a minute on business. The schemer! She's been planning it for a week. I know her. She 'done it o' purpose' — that's the way *she'd* say it!" In her mellow and, when she wished it, not unpleasing contralto, Mrs. Branstane laughed. And perforce, at the happy characterisation, the Judge was obliged to laugh with her. Possibly he hoped, by this ready encouragement of laughter, to lead the discourse into pleasanter paths.

"Silly fool!" Mrs. Branstane said on. "With her insane desire to get on in the world! She has no pride. But her being here is no sign of how high up she's got. It's a sign of something very different. . . . You know very well, my fine gentleman, what that

something different is. . . . I told you this long ago to look out for that man Landis. He's a smart one. Look at the way he's got on — president of his own bank, and all that. Why haven't you invited him long ago to your fine doings? He could have helped you. Any woman would have been clever enough to see that. You might have known he'd have it in for you, after the way you've snubbed him — and his wife besides. Now you've brought things to a pass where that woman can come here and brazen it out where she *knows* she isn't wanted. It's a sign of just what you've come down to, that's what it is. I'll bet Landis himself put her up to it. That man knows well enough how your affairs stand. You can be sure of that. And now your mistakes sit in your parlour and mock at your wife!"

"By George, Nellie! You've got a perfect genius for —"

The Judge stared positive admiration at his duenna. Always he found himself detecting the fact — and it accounted for much of his passive submission to the woman — that though she was crude and undisciplined, she had powers of mind that surpassed his own.

"O-oh, yess! I've got a perfect genius, have I?" Mrs. Branstane dropped the fork and fairly charged upon him. "You have to acknowledge yourself, sometimes, that I'm worth something better than slaving here with dish-towels and dusters for you, eh? Where would you have been, long ago, if it hadn't been for me to run this place and watch over your affairs? Answer me that!"

The Judge whisked about and strode to the broad casement window. There he laughed.

"And who else is there about here that can do it? Answer me that, too!" And once more the Judge whisked about, at the challenge and the sneer. "What *haven't* I done for you that —"

"Oh, yes, yes, Nellie!" he wearily broke in. "Haven't we settled all that long ago?"

"How have we settled it, I'd like to know! What have you ever done for me, let me ask! You've done nothing but admit — *admit* — that *I* really have done quite a lot for you!" Mrs. Branstane's whole person was quivering with rage; her eyes, in their deep mahogany brown, blazed; her cheeks were puffed and deepened in hue; her jaw protruded and seemed to grind the words that she spoke.

"Oh, yes!" the Judge sighed; "you've done a lot! You've made my life a perfect —"

"A perfect hell, eh? So then, you —"

"Oh," the Judge whirled away as he said it, "I've nothing to say!"

"You've never got anything to say! You —"

"I beg you not to shout. Not that I care for myself, of course! But the neighbours might form a poor opinion even of you!"

"Don't worry about me! You've never wasted much of your precious thought on me, Lord knows! You never did do anything but give yourself as good a time as your money could buy. . . . And goodness knows how much you've bought and haven't paid for. How much you've spent behind my back! . . . And such things as you buy to satisfy your lordly self! What do *you* know about art? And yet last week you bought *that* thing!" Mrs. Branstane swept her shapely arm, bared to the elbow, toward a reasonably good painting of fruit and flowers newly hung

upon the dining-room wall. "Now what did you get *that* thing for, when you know perfectly well how your affairs stand? I told you not to buy it."

"That," said the Judge, "is why I bought it."

"There it is!" Mrs. Branstane placed her hands upon her hips, even glancing down to see that they were gracefully disposed, and measured Judge Gayland as if he were a puzzling curiosity whom she might never hope to fathom.

By then Mrs. Branstane took herself to be a qualified critic of humanity. She was nearer to power, nearer to being herself, nearer to getting her legacy. Even people on the street, long accustomed to her landmark green dress, turned now to stare at the crisp browns and greys that began to frame her rich colouring and her vigorous figure. In Mrs. Gayland's company she had begun to take on a superiority that to Mrs. Gayland was still another of the annoyingly inscrutable institutions of Providence. And the Judge's own life had become less supportable than ever, with this greatly increased willingness toward advice on the part of his handmaiden. Advice that had never been grudgingly withheld, Lord knew! The one difference was that it was now a little more loftily expressed.

"Well!" Mrs. Branstane caught her breath for a fresh assault. So obvious, so paramount, was the idiocy of this man that it fairly baffled her. She sorted a few spoons in order to sort over a few thoughts before she proceeded. "So that's why you bought it! . . . Well! Where it's all going to end is a mystery to me. . . . Or, perhaps, it isn't such a mystery after all!" She laughed. "And it's all because you never listened to my advice that —"

"I could scarcely listen to all of it! Faugh!" The Judge made to move away and escape. "This thing sickens me!"

"That's exactly it!" Mrs. Branstane fairly spirted the words, in order to utter them in time to hold him. "That's you all the time, Ira Gayland! That's the very thing in you that has ruined you!"

"*Ruined me?*" Frightened at the word, precisely as Mrs. Branstane desired, the Judge paused with his hand on the curtain. "Ruined? How you talk!"

"Yes, ruined! I said ruined! There it is! You never stand up to things as they are. As long as I can remember you, back in your boyhood days, Ira Gayland, you've been a coward. As soon as you get in a tight place, where a little effort is needed, you say, 'Faugh, this thing sickens me!' And then you run. Run! Run, run, run! You've done that about as long as you can. How much farther have you got to go? Answer me that. Where are you going to land? Answer me that. What are you going to do when your term runs out? And for all your bragging, you need the salary, and you know it. And how are you going to get elected again? What do they all think of you in this town? What sort of Judge have you made! . . . Oh, all your life, Ira Gayland — and for all the grand show you've laid on — you've been a failure. A failure, and you know it. Just see where you are! You've ruined yourself with these silly extravagances. Ruined yourself, and ruined your family."

"And haven't" — the Judge cut in — "and haven't saved anything for you to get hold of, eh, Nellie?" he finally retorted; for, sometimes, when he was

stung to an extraordinary degree of desperation, he would stand up to his tormentor.

The world, it so happens, has a sad way of exacting payment for every particle of fun that it tosses out so freely. You will dance and take your pleasure, and go on down the pathway of your days, pleased with yourself for having disported so cunningly. Yet, on a day least expected, your late piper will step up beside you and present his bill. It may be soon, it may be long in coming. And there are those that have danced and have dodged the piper too. The rest of us, not so clever, and perhaps more honest, are required to settle.

Judge Gayland was settling. Poor devil, when had he done anything but settle! Constantly he put to himself, in the night, or in moments like this, that question. Considering the small portion of amusement he had ever got out of life, for all the effort and expense it had cost him, he was paying a cruelly high price.

"Saved anything for me?" Mrs. Branstane had instantly retorted to his sarcasm.

But the Judge scarcely heard her. Once more he had moved toward the window, and stood there, with his hands behind his back, under the tails of his coat, which he swayed to keep Mrs. Branstane deluded with the belief that he listened and weakly surrendered again to her improving lecture.

Once more she had called up his boyhood, and his own memory of it rose again in review.

CHAPTER II

SO the Judge's eye roved slightly beyond the Claversons' lawn next door, where the spots of salvia were still bloody red, and the hydrangea began to take on its Fall blushes, and a flock of belated robins made gluttons of themselves among the worms driven to the surface by the rain of the night before.

Beyond the Claverson lawn he was seeing again Hoytville, the pretty little village in a western corner of the State. And his mother, belle of the place, who had died in his early youth; and his father, roystering scapegrace, who had lived only long enough to embitter the boy with recollections of drunken disgrace. The father's death, at last, in a drinking bout, and his own adoption by the village druggist and postmaster — father of Nellie. Nellie, then an infant in arms, impressing Hoytville chiefly as a stout pair of lungs and a deal of what her father was pleased to call spirit.

School days, later; till he was nineteen; and the evening when he left the Jones family and the town — with such a curious cause behind his expulsion. Nellie, thirteen then, and uncontrollably wilful, had acquired for him that far from sisterly affection which her mother thought to cure by sending him away to a clerkship in the neighbouring town of Waynesburg.

Only to intensify, by his dismissal, the fervour of affection in the young Juliet!

It all came back to the Judge. Nellie's visits to an aunt in that neighbouring town, with a frequency that her mother tried every expedient in vain to suppress. Even in the face of sterner discouragements Nellie's visits had persisted.

For by then the boy Ira had wearied of the persecution of her attentions. In the flight of the days he had arrived at the one great chance which is said to visit every life. Finding a place in the office, as in the affections, of a Waynesburg lawyer, the boy Ira appeared to have found his forte. Latent ambition was stirred in him — and likewise vanity. As surprising new prospects opened before him, there quickly came to Ira all that wisdom and foresight which are common to nineteen. The village of Waynesburg came to look puny in his eyes, and the social station of Nellie Jones very ordinary. Her pestilential predilection for him, which had become the stock jest of the community, at last annoyed Ira so acutely that he took steps of his own toward its suppression.

That is, he began to pay elaborate attention to other girls in the town. In his misguided way he thought to be rid of the Jones girl by a redoubled interest in these others.

Nellie's preference for him stood out only the more marked and unalterable.

There, at that point, Ira had first uncovered the trait which, he could see now — indeed Nellie herself had just forcibly reminded him — had chiefly played havoc with his life. His tendency to take to flight.

For one night the boy Ira fled Waynesburg too, and forsook the lawyer who loved and befriended him, and the girl who had made herself such an insupportable nuisance.

Philadelphia, then. There, at first, Ira had met with few friends, but with many vicissitudes. Yet the demand for young men after the Civil War soon put his nimble wits at a premium with a firm of lawyers, in whose esteem, as in whose service, he rapidly rose.

Only to arouse the other of his two dominant and fatal traits.

In pride of his progress he had written back to Hoytville and to Nellie, in a letter much more boastful than politic, fuller of gratitude than of tact. The druggist Jones was highly gratified — and so was his daughter Nellie, who promptly ran away from home to join her Ira in Philadelphia, where she was certain to be more inconvenient than ever to the rising boy. And the consequences were that, in desperation, the boy saved his prospects and his peace a second time in a reluctant but a needful flight.

Nellie, left behind, disconsolate, in Philadelphia, had become a domestic, according to her own veracious story; and sometime, in the four or five years that had ensued, she sought release from servitude in marriage with a man whose name she gave or invented as Branstane. That worthy had helped her to an imposing name, indeed; but the only other thing he had left her, in a desert of unhappy memories, was the solitary oasis of his death.

Ten years more, and, safely retired to Rossacre, Ira had seen himself, more by luck than by solid endeavour, a leading personage — prosperous lawyer — fortunate investor — elected Judge of the Common Pleas Court — and social leader of the town, which pleased him most of all. At appropriate intervals had come his marriage, the birth of his daughter, and the building of his handsome mansion.

And finally had come one of the penalties of rising fame. On the day when she first saw his name in a newspaper — “rising young lawyer,” and all that — Mrs. Nellie Branstane once more set forth in pursuit of Ira. Five or ten years of stern toil had somewhat subdued the formidable Nellie. Yet Gayland vividly recalled his sensations when, after travelling much of the way to him on foot, she had reached Rossacre and presented herself at his office.

Weary, worn, and humbled, she had seemed innocuous enough. Yet years before the consequences came, Gayland had every opportunity to forecast what would come of her presence in his house. Poor beggar, impressed by Nellie’s moving account of his debt to her family, impressed by the more touching story of the miseries she had undergone because of him since then, and fooled by her humble mien, he had weakened generously and given her a place and a task in his home. Feeling safe in his exalted position, he had thought it rather a handsome act and a credit to his character.

So, in differing senses, they had taken each other in.

It all flashed before the Judge as he stood there at the window, thinking of these things — thinking of the serious plight he had got himself into at last. Every day Rossacre passed his gate, and cast envious eyes over his vast lawn, over his splendid house. Hardworking grocers passed it, and wondered what life must be like to a man who had always his own way, as happened to Gayland. Grocers’ daughters passed the beautiful place, and dreamed of the dances they would give if *they* lived in such a house; of the gowns they would wear; of the clever little speeches of theirs, too, that would be bandied about the town,

as Annabel Gayland's were, and considered so clever. So Rossacre passed the Gayland gate daily, and long was denied its exultant discovery of the worries that haunted that house also, as they haunt nearly every other.

While the Gayland fortunes lasted, they had made a brave success; but Gayland was without the thews to hold them. While his money held out he had bought off the young and rising world about him. As it was he was going down gamely, in sheer bewilderment of having had after all such a beggarly show. Why, in any event, a thousand times he had asked himself, had he of all men to be burdened with the incubus of that woman! And, irony of it, in return for no wrong to her whatever except what was her own choosing.

The answer, so far as there was an answer, was of course that Gayland had been sunny where stamina was required. Sunniness he had always dispensed about him, and no whit of it had he received in return. What source of sympathy Mrs. Branstane was is clear enough already. Mrs. Gayland herself had nothing to offer. And never could Lord Bountiful endure to unmask before his daughter, the one person in the world who thought him good and dear. Never had he been permitted really to love, even his daughter; and a world of unuttered tenderness lay in him, pathetically eager for chances of expression. All his life long it had been the Judge's single passion to fill Annabel's life with every harmless joy, and keep from it every possible pain. And if, mistakenly, he had delayed visiting upon her the reason for reducing her joys, surely he was generous rather than mistaken. Daily the Judge lived by his daughter's side, yearning for sympathy, and generously neglecting to exact the

time and labour for its expression. By day he impersonated to her the rock of self-reliance, the inexhaustible source of cheer and favours; and often at night he would steal sleepless from his room, and cross the hall and kiss the door behind which she slept in ignorance of his hunger for her love. To Annabel he was the all-sufficient provider; to the world a pompous ass; to Mrs. Branstane a ruined weakling: but behind all of these suffered a defenceless man, generous and self-giving, alone with many troubles.

"Saved anything for me!" the Judge started from his revery to hear Mrs. Branstane repeating more loudly still, to revive his wandering attention. "Well, yes, if you want to know it, just where do *I* come in, I'd like to know! Ho-ow are you going to repay me all you owe me! Ho-ow are you going to make up for all the misery you've given me! It's hi-igh time you made a clean breast of things to Annabel and her mother. You can't go on with these silly extravagances. No more of these fine dances for you, my fine friend! And Annabel with her talk of Palm Beach and Pasadena! If you had listened to me all along —"

"Yes, yes!" the Judge granted, in a voice as far away as his thoughts, as he edged away toward the door. "Yes, I guess you're right, Nellie. I must attend to the matter. I really must. But meanwhile Mrs. Gayland may be ready at last for her drive."

And he successfully vanished.

"As if I had never 'listened' to you!" he groaned to himself as he achieved his escape.

Behind him he left Mrs. Branstane laughing her curious chuckle of satisfaction as he slipped away.

CHAPTER III

MRS. BRANSTANE felt entitled now to laugh whenever she pleased, before the comfortable spectacle of her rising prospects. Once sullen and angered at being denied her due place in the world, she now brightened with the hope of attaining it at last. And for all she held Gayland responsible for her long subjection, even he had a share in her gathering sweetness, as Annabel's practical philanthropy promised her a substantial opportunity to rise and shine and take her station one evening about that time.

The sweetness was destined to a short life, however, and the opportunity to rise was postponed for a period.

It is probable that the comedy of Mrs. Branstane at that stage was fully comprehended, and as fully enjoyed, by only two persons in Rossacre — two young men who occupied a suite of rooms on the top floor of "The Club," otherwise the Lincoln Club, in command of a fine sweep of the town, of the river that divided it, and of the mountain beyond that guarded its southern side like a gigantic vine-covered stone fence, then emblazoned with foliage in all the hues of dying September. Their chambers consisted of two bedrooms — of monkish dimensions — a pair of baths, a sitting-room of more generous expanse and more sybaritic garnishings, and a sixth room known to its proprietors as "The Sink." In this cubicle the Hon. Andrew Penning was wont to moil over his tougher cases at law in the still watches of the night,

while his younger friend, Sherry Brookes, passed the time in profitable slumber, or in occupations a little less profitable.

On this particular evening the two gentlemen were deep and profane in the processes of prinking for bridge at the home of Senator Banks, with the club that owed its origin and its energies to the Misses Banks and Gayland.

"You'll see her for yourself this evening," Penning was shouting from his bath to the occupant of the other bath at the opposite end of the suite. And like all his remarks, when he happened to be amused, it was uttered in abysmal gloom.

"She's going to run the show, is she?"

"Yes. But not in her professional capacity."

"As a guest? Mrs. Brimstone? Good Lord!"

"Just that."

Sherry whistled, then roared with laughter. "Oh, you're kiddin'!"

"I *may* be mistaken."

"You — you mean the girls have *taken her up*?"

"I believe Miss Gayland wants to show her something of life."

"Who told you! The Brimstone woman?"

"A higher authority."

"Good Lord!"

A pause.

"Some row!" Sherry resumed. "I don't know what there is about that creature, but she affects me like a floating mine. What do you make of her yourself?"

"I'm rather puzzled by the intentions of her Maker. She's formed a very favourable impression of herself, I can see."

"But who is she? Queer bird for the Gayland cage, I always thought. I can't seem to fix her."

"My dear Sherry! I wonder if any woman who can be discussed in a gentlemen's club isn't — 'fixed'?"

At the finish of his laughter Sherry said, "Well! I'm glad I've got you for a friend instead of an enemy!"

"I'm sorry I said that."

"You needn't be. That woman doesn't ring right. I can just see Isabel Warren looking that dame over! And —"

Sherry rushed to Penning's door with something on his mind and a broad smile on his face that showed through even a rich coating of lather. "That reminds me!" he chuckled, leaning against the jamb. "That isn't the only row that's on for to-night! Pen, I'll lay you a five-spot I beat down old Banks this very night. Are you on? I've got the swellest little thunderbolt up my sleeve!" And he fairly smacked his lips over the same.

"What's the great idea?"

"Not one, but two! Wait and see." He turned away toward his own quarters, fairly singing, "Oh, I'm going to score, I'm going to score; *o-oh*, I'm going to score, going to score; yes, I'm going to score this night." And in a moment more he burst into song outright, or into his best imitation of the gentle muse, —

*"O-oh, the cap'n of police is dead
Through having lost his life."*

A moment more and Sherry had thought better of his mystery, or sought to deepen it, and again thrust his head through Penning's door. "You heard me,

I take it? I'm going to score to-night. I'm going to be back there again, the same old faithful house-dog of old. You wait and see. I'm going to land there in spite of Nick. In spite of *Banks*, mind you! Thanks to you!" he finished, and fled.

"To me?"

"To you," the call came back.

"I don't follow you. I've kept religiously out of your affairs."

"That's just what you've done. I 'follow' you. You know that, don't you? Or am I just breaking the news?"

"It's an interesting theory. But you wouldn't dare state it if I were in the same room with you!"

"Oh, cut it! You know well enough that I'm on to you. You'd be a nice fellow if you ever allowed yourself to be outspoken. I mean outspoken about yourself, and not about me! Do I make myself clear?"

"Clearly an idiot!"

"Pretty poor for you. I thought you'd come back at me with something more about marriage being only another form of warfare."

"Which it is."

"Well, I notice that you're thinking of enlisting yourself."

A silence.

"I say, you seem to be enlisting yourself."

A silence.

With that the younger man again left his room, this time attired to the extent of a pair of grey socks, an under-shirt, and a still heavy coating of lather on his face, which he thrust impudently into the doorway of the elder man's bath.

"I happened to remark," he further remarked, "that you seem to be enlisting on your own hook."

"Yes?"

"Yes!"

"Well?"

"Well! . . . Damn you for an old crab! Now tell me all about it. Is she nice to you? And do you really mean it? Or are you cruelly bluffing, just to fool old Banks and leave the way clear for me, with Sylvia?"

Upon his impertinent questioner Penning turned an oval of iridescent lather and the two singularly brilliant grey eyes of the Hon. Andrew.

"Oh, you old sphinx, you can't terrify me. Why can't you talk? . . . To me, anyhow!"

"You're off, chronologically, only about a million years, my dear boy." Penning turned back to his shaving. "I'm not a sphinx. Only a mummy. And — I — find Miss Gayland a charming person."

"My stars! What a revelation! What a baring of a soul!" There the intruding Sherry ventured into the room far enough to land a light hook on the wind of the impenetrable Penning. "Well! I'm glad there's *somebody* about can make the dumb speak."

"My dear fellow" — Penning wiped his razor — "do you really want to know why I talk so little?"

"I suppose it's because there's nobody by to listen?"

"It's because I have so little to say."

"Ah! *Delicate* hint! Thanks so much!" And once more Sherry achieved an orderly retreat, singing still.

Twenty minutes later the two men were passing in review before each other, suiting the height of a

trouser leg to the other's ideal, or their hats to the proper cant. With still a good half hour to waste, and with the lively remains of a fire still crackling on the hearth, they sat down for a pipe, and one of them for a taste of spirits. The other in high animal spirits instead. He was humming. On the old rope-edge library table between them a tall Cloisonné lamp rose out of a pile of books — Wells's "Mr. Britling," a Rabelais richly bound, half a dozen novels rather verging on the frivolous, Dostoievsky's "House of the Dead," Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams" — a hasty eye might have made out the titles, and would have had no difficulty in deciphering the tastes and identity of the readers. And always Sherry was humming.

At length Penning spoke. "I have at least my Scotch; while you, besides your superiority, have, evidently, something on your mind. How long has it been since — ?"

"Ten dry weeks!"

"But think of the reward!"

The humming was resumed.

"Why are you twittering there, like a canary! What's all this warning for Banks?"

"O-oh, just going to play the part of Providence for a while. Caught a hint the other day of a dirty little deal that that fellow Landis may pull on the Senator, that's all. Or, that's half of it. The other half's better yet!" And the humming went on, —

*"O-oh, the cap'n of police is dead
Through having lost his life,"*

till Sherry's pipe went out.

"I'd tell you all about the first half," Sherry went

on, as he struck a match, "only I'm afraid you might score first. And I want to cut what poor little figure I can before the little Senator. Seeing what prize I'm playing for. Can you blame me? . . . Though I suppose," Sherry sighed, "he'll have his work cut out for him, forgetting my little escapades!"

Handsome devil Sherry was, as he sat, or rather lay back, in his deep chair; with his dark hair brushed back, his deep blue eyes twinkling; with his dimpled chin founded on a firm jaw, and his dashing, even princely air. "Even my little pile of money won't talk to him, now, any more!" Sherry contradicted his observation, "since I sank about half of it in a dare-devil venture the other day! I'll tell you about that, in good time, too," he chuckled on. "But" — he looked across the table suddenly and frankly, "you know what really 'queered' me with the Senator, don't you?"

"Don't know which particular thing among the million did it," Penning calculated.

"Oh, it wasn't my deviltry so much, I think," Sherry mused into the fire, as if taking an inventory of his past. "But a long time ago," he fell into reverie, "before you came here, when Banks was just busting into politics, his brother got married — in Banks's house — and Banks got him up a great funeral. Wanted to make a tremendous hit with the electorate — I believe he calls it electorate now. Outdoor wedding, and all that; with a brass band to play the wedding march. Well" — Sherry lurched deeper into his chair — "just when the thing started, band tooting, bridal party all ready, and all that, I sneaked up behind the leader, where the band could all see me, and began sucking a lemon."

Sherry chuckled, and a broad grin spread itself over the features of Penning.

"I will say, the effect was something beautiful. It puckered the jaws of every mother's son of them, and they couldn't play another note. The leader got flustered, and raved, and — really never knew what was the matter. By that time the band couldn't play for laughing — with the crowd roaring too. And just when things were nicely mussed up, out runs little Banks, swearing and purple in the face, mad as a wet hen. And the long and short of it was that they had to play the grand march on an old piano in the house. . . . Well," Sherry finished, after a moment with his briar, "of course it got into the papers, and became a town joke. I wasn't, you see, thinking about Sylvia then. But I guess," he stretched and yawned, "it was that, more than anything else, that got me in wrong with the Senator. "It — it seemed to get under his skin," he finished, with a sad stare into the fire.

For a long moment Penning confronted the same blaze with his broad grin.

"I wish," mused Sherry, further, with a sigh first and then a chuckle, "I wish I were as certain of Sylvia as I am of the Senator!" It was clear that he hoped for encouragement.

Which, after a long pause, he received.

"Your 'escapades,'" said Penning, "as you call them, will turn out to be your best card with Sylvia. They strike me dead with envy. One has to have a genius for that sort of thing. There's something deep down in womankind that admires that sort of thing in a man. It isn't base, either. I believe every woman knows that the man best able to measure the

real goodness in her is the man who has burned all the dross out of himself. He has no interest in her but an honest worship. In your eminently proper man there's a ravening unsatisfied beast, and every woman knows it. A chap like you brings to a good girl a few sorry recollections, but a mind able to measure how high she stands. He — looks up from such a depth, you know."

Sherry glanced across the table between them and said, with a curiously peering smile, "Why — why did you say all that to me? Do you — do you mind if I use that on Sylvia?"

"Use everything you can! You'll have to!"

"See here!" Sherry now turned to lean far across the table. "I'm an impudent cuss. But I believe you told me all that for just that purpose. To help me out with Sylvia."

"I want you to win."

"But I mean something else. See here! I believe you think so much of that dear girl that —"

"That I want *you* to have her. Likely, isn't it!"

"With *you* it's likely!"

Penning slowly transferred his stare from the fire on the hearth to the blaze in Sherry's eyes.

"I mean it!" the younger man insisted. "You're — you're deliberately putting useful words into my mouth!"

"You'll need more than words!" Penning turned his gaze away, and quickly dusted the other man's vision with other ideas. "You'll need more than words. For a time she may shrink from you. But I'll think the worse of Sylvia — I'd think the worse of any girl — who let slip such a fellow as you. After all, you're not precisely vicious!"

"Oh!" Sherry laughed. "I'm too much the snob to dip very deep into the rough stuff!"

"And while," Penning went on, to keep the discourse in just the key where he wanted it, "while virginity and purity are precious things, the girl who sets too high a store on them ends only in ridicule. Those qualities don't gain in value by being eternally saved. They gain by being given. I'll wager any shrivelled spinster can recall — and regret — at least one fatal moment when she decided that her saintly charm was too good to surrender."

A pause. And then Sherry. —

"You say that as if you were explaining something to yourself. But — but may I spout that, too?"

"You 'd better!"

"Why" — the younger man ventured farther across the table, and ventured farther still with his speech — "why don't you plead all that for yourself?"

"My dear boy! I haven't your fine romantic style!"

There, fearfully or not, Sherry ventured as far as a real thunderbolt, which he launched straight into Penning's gaze. "As if Sylvia Banks didn't know, and didn't think it romantic, that you are stepping aside for me! And as if she didn't know, if I talk that sort of stuff, where it comes from!"

The answer came back gravely. "Sherry, my lad, two good friends should never lie to each other. I'm not making game of Miss Gayland. And I truly worship Sylvia — as an object in Nature. Any man would. So that doesn't entitle me to credit even for unusual good taste. If any young woman should care to interest herself in me I'd consider myself an object of charity. Very grateful of course!" He looked

away again to the fire. "But the truth is, I'm a mummy. Though it may be some credit that I know it."

Sherry laughed, a bit tartly, a little hurt at the rebuff to his honest overtures toward confidence. "Yes, I've noticed that! As if all you've said to me isn't spoken by a man's very bearing, by his every look and move! And more plainly than you've just put it in words! They all sense it in you. If you believe you're a mummy, just look into every pretty face you see there to-night. They even suspect why you are shining up to Annabel Gayland. Only, of course, it wouldn't be decent of you to speak the truth to your best friend!"

"My dear Sherry —"

"Oh, understand me!" Sherry was not to be halted. "It's not that you're concealing anything mean. That's not your kind. It's the other way round. I believe" — Sherry studied him intently, and then, for an amateur, delivered himself of a singularly penetrating psychological judgment — "I believe that you take a fiendish delight in baffling people, with your cleverness. You like to bewilder 'em and fool 'em and tease 'em. And that isn't all. I believe you're simply too decent to show your full decency. But," he added somewhat wistfully, "I wish you wouldn't hide it. From me."

Penning was stretching his arms. "My dear Sherry!" a last time he battled the tide of words. "Your conjectures are much finer than my facts." He glanced over his shoulder at the tall old clock in the corner. "It's high time we were going. Clap on your things."

But Sherry had risen too, and was placing his hands

on Penning's shoulders. "Pen," he said, "you're a puzzle. But you're an honest man, if ever there was one. I'd be lost if *you* were in the way. But I take you at your word. Thanks to you" — he fell into chuckles again — "I score to-night! I score, I score, I score!" And he commiserated still again the cap'n of police.

CHAPTER IV

A HALF hour later, taking casual inventory of the eight and forty young spirits foregathered in the Banks drawing-rooms, fizzing into endless chatter, Penning wondered where else on earth, or in fable or fancy, so much ineffable physical beauty might be assembled — Annabel Gayland, with her elfin grey eyes, her saucy mouth, her pretty wit; Sylvia, a bit more decorative, under the golden cobweb of her hair; even Isabel Warren, the fading remnants of her dark beauty emblazoned in the most daring of yellow gowns. To produce such bewildering graces it needs, Penning decided, the feebler excitements, the quieter life, the regular hours, the sober fortunes, the more intimate human sympathies of the smaller city.

What though their discourse did savour strongly of the personal and minor interests of the tiny metropolis — of the skating club they meant to organise for the new dancing on ice; or maybe reminiscence — of the merry outings of the summer newly past, of the house parties at divers lodges in the nearby hills or by the nearer streams. Early in the evening Sheridan Brookes experienced a shock at the unexpected success of his campaign to enlist the regard of Senator Banks, when the Senator, it may be absent-mindedly, accepted his invitation to a hunting party in mid-October. The remainder of the evening, or what might be called its interludes, they devoted of

course to the purpose of the evening, to auction, until the fortunes of the cards bestowed, as usual, the gentleman's prize to Mr. Penning, and to Isabel Warren, as ever, the confection reserved for the leading lady.

Miss Gayland's evening, however, could scarcely be classified as an unmitigated pleasure. There occurred, during the evening, incidents not strictly to her taste.

For example it pained her to find that Mr. Penning was so clearly a weakling. He allowed the odious Isabel Warren to absorb far too much of his time and his conversation — chiefly, it must be said in his favour, in dutiful attention to her somewhat extended recital of rather recent experiences in Europe. It was immediately after the solo violin of the orchestra had delivered, rather acceptably, that haunting bit of human compassion which Beethoven has written, curiously, into the minuet of one of his violin-and-pianoforte sonatas, that he chose a moment of impressive silence to say, gravely, —

“I like music. . . . It knows.”

Whereat everyone stared at Penning, and wondered what it was he “knew” — perhaps, Miss Annabel thought, beyond anything he had ever confided to her.

Otherwise the occasion was memorable chiefly for the almost miraculous measure of regard which Sherry Brookes was enabled to extract from Senator Banks. If anyone could have been more astonished at this than the Senator himself, that one would have been Penning, for even Sherry's most intimate friend could scarcely have escaped stupefaction at the new cubits which he added to his polity. The Senator of

course remained what Nature had made him originally — the fox; yet beside him Sherry contrived to measure at least the wits of a highly intelligent fox-terrier.

He was obliged to wait, his nerves notwithstanding, through nearly the whole evening before he saw the happy opportunity to "score," as he had darkly hinted; but then, the refreshments being served, and the gentlemen having duly retired for a mid-evening cigar or cigarette, he did manœuvre the tactful segregation of the Senator in a room beneath the broad stair reserved by Mrs. Banks for those addicted to the filthy habit.

Having backed the Senator into a corner, he asked, in a whisper, "Have you a moment to spare, sir? I have something of the very utmost importance to tell you. Not about Sylvia," he was careful to add.

"H'm! What's it about?" the Senator said aloud.

"Not about Sylvia, sir," Sherry doubled the assurance. "Strictly business. And I shouldn't bother you with it if I didn't think it of the highest importance, sir. If you please?"

"Oh, very well." The Senator reluctantly led the way to his study. "Now, then! Fire away!" he commanded, when he had shut the door.

Sherry sat down in one of the enormous oaken and leathern chairs, rested his arms on the massive oaken table in the best diplomatic manner, and said,

"Are you quite sure, sir, of the best intentions of Mr. Landis, in the matter of the street-car extension?"

"H'm, h'm! Aren't you beyond your depth, my boy?"

"No matter about that, sir. I happen to know —

it's come to my ears — that Mr. Landis may not be quite willing to surrender the property turned over to him as security for his note, and —”

“How come you to know about such things, young man!”

“I beg you to forget that, and listen to what I say, sir. I've learned that Mr. Landis isn't quite trustworthy in matters of agreement between gentlemen. I know that you're concerned, sir, because you've said nothing about it to Mr. Penning. He told me this evening that he always knew when you were worried, because you then never confided your worries to him. I hope, sir, you've taken the precaution to place everything that you've done in such shape that nothing open to interpretation outside of the strict reading of —”

“Bless your soul, you leave that to me, young man!” The Senator airily waved his hand. “I'm not quite an infant in matters of business.”

Sherry was thinking, “Oh, but you are, sir!” Aloud he said, “No, sir; but you're so honest that you are apt to believe that everyone is as honest and scrupulous as yourself. And —”

“Tut, tut!” the Senator let himself be tickled by that into a smile. “That may be. But I defy any man to beat me at any game, sir!” At any rate he was not going to have his wits impugned, however safe might be his morals!

“Quite true, sir. But in Mr. Landis you are dealing with a man —”

“Who is shrewder than myself, you mean?”

“Oh, by no means. But one who will bear —”

“Leave that to me, young man! Leave it to me to take care of Mr. Landis. Believe me, I value your

kindly intentions. But I've been in business some years, Sherry, and I know —"

"Yes, sir. You're quite at ease about this —?"

The Senator held up a deprecating hand. "Oh, quite, quite. Trust me —"

"I'm glad to hear you say so, sir. I wanted you to know that, quite apart from any personal interest, you understand. I wanted you to have the benefit of knowledge that had come to my ears — knowledge that I thought might have been purposely withheld from you. Sometimes, you know, we boys hear things that come to us just because we are boys and are not supposed to know its importance."

"Very good of you, Sherry, I'm sure," the Senator beamed, tilting back his head till he blew a very tall plume from his cigar. "I'm glad to see you're in the way of mending your ways. Keep it up. I'm convinced there's a place for you, in Rossacre, if you once get down to it."

"Yes, sir. I knew you'd want your son-in-law to be worth while."

The tilt of the Senator's head was suddenly lowered. "Son-in-law? Son-in-law be damned! Put that out of your head!"

"Oh, my dear Senator! That was settled long ago. I don't see how you can well get along without me. You knew, of course, that Sylvia and her mother are going with me to Cambridge to see the Yale game?"

"Yale game? Yale game be damned, sir! What are you talking about the Yale game! Sylvia is not going with you to the Yale game!"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I think you're mistaken. Mrs. Banks herself has agreed to it, and — speaking as man to man — you know yourself that — er—

that settles it. And then there's another thing," Sherry blandly hurried on, to forestall the explosion that was due. "You know, don't you, that I bought 'The Globe' last week? I've had to keep it more or less quiet, for a reason I'll tell you in a moment. It struck me that you and I could use it to advantage together. You see? Nothing like having an organ, for the expression of one's opinion. There are a lot of things in Rossacre that I want to attend to myself. Take the Board of Public Works. You know yourself what a job you had to get clear of the row that blew when the Board of Public Works made an awful blunder about opening the Washington Street extension, and forgot to stipulate the assessments on the property abutters for sidewalks and curbing within two years. When the time came they couldn't collect. The city lost \$8,000 by the slip, and for all you yourself got it hushed up, the city council had to raise the tax rate sixty cents a thousand all round to make up the deficit. Of course I'd take every precaution to see that your name was kept out of it, but think what a howl there would be if I gave that matter a little publicity. You see?"

The Senator stared.

"And then there's Sam Parks. I wonder if you knew, when you got him elected chairman of the Board of Public Works, that he's employed by a firm of road builders? You see, he sells the city his brand of paving, and then collects a commission from the city, as well as his salary, and finally gets his brother-in-law a job as city engineer as well."

The Senator stared.

"And then there's Tom Moody. I believe you got him appointed Chairman of the Board of Assessors.

I've noticed that his salary is \$2,500 a year — not bad in itself. Yet he puts in a bill to the city amounting to \$3,500 for — for 'incidentals.' And if I look up the records I find further 'incidentals.' Possibly you haven't had time to watch up the matter."

The Senator coughed. And stared. He walked to a new station, and stared.

"And then Brady, chief of the Fire Department, who issues all the licenses for garages, at a fee of a dollar each. But you and I know what we gave for our licenses, I'm sure. And then Pratt, the city purchasing agent. He's bought three new pieces of motor fire-apparatus from the Wrotton concern. And — while there may be no connection whatever, understand me — I noticed the other day a mighty fine Wrotton touring car in Pratt's garage. Possibly you've seen it?"

The Senator said "H'm" and rolled his eyes, and brought them back to the original stare.

"You see, Senator, I have a notion that I can be of real service to this community after all, if I once get down to it, as you advise. I know you agree?" Sherry smiled as if sure of an approving pat on the head. "Even if it did take half of my ready money, I'm sure that purchase of 'The Globe' will be a good investment. Of course I've tallied off only the small jobs. But what I really bought the paper for was to support your campaign for Penning for the Judgeship."

Sherry turned his head to the ceiling and devoted himself to his cigarette, to give that time to soak in.

"I've kept the deal quiet because I knew if you set out to push him for the job he might soar up to his moral heights and refuse it. But I'm sure I can

make 'The Globe' useful whenever you give me the word. If you and I pull together for Penning, there'll be nothing to it. And I can't tell you how glad I am that we are to be so closely associated. I've always admired your abilities. We can't help getting on famously together. And now —" Sherry held out his hand to the Senator, who, taken so utterly aback, meekly accepted it "— I know you'll forgive me for tearing myself away from you and rushing back to Sylvia. But one last word. Don't fail to keep an eye on Landis, will you?"

"One moment!" the Senator gasped.

"Yes?" Sherry said cheerily, with the most innocent curiosity in the world.

"Ha — Have a cigar!" the Senator commanded, and extended his gold-mounted case for Sherry's choice.

And there is no knowing how far the Senator's condescension might have condescended but for an interruption. Sylvia put her head in the door, and then drew back with an "O-oh!"

"Yes?" said Sherry, as if he himself were the host.

"I — I only wanted to ask Father if he'd have the orchestra play a few dances," Sylvia hastened to apologise for the intrusion.

"Oh, *I'll* attend to that!" Sherry answered superbly. And with that Sylvia had fled the sacred precincts, and from the astonishing spectacle of her father in the act of lighting a cigar firmly tilted between Sherry Brookes's lips.

A few brief dances followed, and then the party dispersed.

While the servants were turning off the lights, the Senator sought out the company of his daughter, and said.

"Sylvia, one moment, please." He kissed her. "Has — has anything passed lately between Sherry and you?"

"No, father. Why?"

"Hasn't he asked you to go to the Yale game in Cambridge — with your mother?"

"N-no." But Sylvia's eyes had brightened suddenly. "N-not yet," she added. "But if he does, I may go?"

"Has he said anything to you about — about being my son-in-law?"

"Good gracious, father! He wouldn't dare!"

"Oh, he wouldn't dare, would he?"

And Sylvia wondered why her father, as he turned off the last hall light, chuckled so strangely.

Out of the darkness he said to her in a sepulchral voice, "You like him?"

And out of the darkness he received an embrace and a kiss.

CHAPTER V

OUT of the cooler darkness of the Autumn night Penning, seeing how sorely Annabel had been bruised, courageously followed her into the dimly lit entry to her home. There, as she divined his motive, she took his hand and led him with her into the more generously lighted drawing-room. Neither was moved to waste words on a matter so patent to both — the outstanding blot on Annabel's evening.

It had been ordered of Fate that "The Globe" next morning would be obliged, in the interest of truth, to omit from "among those present" at Sylvia's contribution to the excitements of Rossacre, the name of Mrs. Branstane. Fate not in the amiable person of Sylvia, who rather approved the sensation of uplift, but of Sylvia's mother. That excellent and well-fed lady, when approached at the last moment with Annabel's earnest, not to say eloquent, appeal in behalf of her duenna, had balked, in some indignation.

"So that's what they learn at school, these days!" she sniffed, in summary dismissal of any such wild scheme of social regeneration.

And so, since the words necessary to Annabel's mixed emotions were not in her immediate vocabulary, she went to the piano, with her cloak still about her shoulders, and played first something highly heroic, from Beethoven, and then something excruciatingly melancholy, from Chopin. Never had her

finishing-school education served such a practical purpose before.

Penning, seated crosswise on one of the Judge's pet Queen Anne chairs, his coat folded across his lap, to mark the highly temporary nature of his lingering, gently smiled at the swaying back of the girl, bowed as it were under its first touch of the weary weight of our world.

When she had thundered sufficient indignation out of the piano, and dwindled off into mere pianissimo mumbling with the keys, he said to her quietly, with his chin resting on the back of the chair.

"Want me to tell you what's the matter — with all of us? I see it in every person here that I know, — and don't know. We're all herded inside a pen that's too small for us. We never see or do anything big. . . . Do I bore you?" he hauled up quickly.

Annabel continued to bend over the keys and commune with them lightly.

"Funny little town!" He dropped his chin again upon his fist on the back of the chair. "But a charming place. I think it's only in a town like this that people dare to be themselves. That, I suppose, is because we live so much on top of each other that anything not genuine dies a mighty quick death! And yet —" Penning looked up at Annabel's pretty maiden shoulders. "God pity a spirit that happens to be larger than the town! That means nearly everybody here. But especially —you." He paused for some possible response. "Time and again I've heard you plead for 'something to do, something to do!'" — he imitated her tone as she was accustomed to plead it. "Anything to do! in short." He began to laugh at her gently. "Things, sometimes, that

may not be quite possible?" He was rising to go, feeling sure of his point. "Well," he finished, "when-ever you are taken that way, don't — don't take it too hard. Give in. We all have to."

To that there was a quite possible verbal response. Annabel wheeled about on the bench before the piano, and rose swiftly and came to him.

"O-oh!" — she grasped both his hands, — "you — you always make me understand — *everything!*" And she kissed him. "But wait!" She hesitated, for the characteristic generosity in her, always a light sleeper, was instantly awake. "May I — may I tell that to Brannie? I think it will help her too. Say yes! . . . O-oh!" she ended abruptly, for over Penning's shoulder she saw Mrs. Branstane appear in the broad hall doorway.

"I beg your pardon!" that lady said, though she made no pretense of withdrawing. "I thought you had finished, and I came in to turn out the lights."

And when, a few minutes later, Penning contrived to achieve his exit, Annabel was still consoling her faithful duenna. "O-oh, Brannie, I'm so sorry! I'm so disgusted with this stupid little town! It's too small for us, that's what it is!" he heard her paraphrasing his philosophy as he closed the door behind him almost unnoticed.

Often the destinies of persons turn upon very small hinges. Had Annabel brought her consolations to Mrs. Branstane an hour or two earlier, they would have met such a fury of rage and disappointment as would have killed once for all whatever was charitable in Annabel. As it was, at that hour, Mrs. Branstane's indignation at her slight had somewhat abated. It

may be, too, that Mr. Penning's remarks had been helpful to the understanding of Mrs. Branstane also.

"Isn't it a stupid town!" Annabel raged, and kissed the lady.

"Well," Mrs. Branstane drawled, "it isn't your fault. You can't just boss the town."

"You wait!" Annabel answered hotly, forgetfully, incorrigibly. "I don't blame you for losing faith in me. But wait and see! I'll get up a party of my own, right here in this house — expressly for you. I should have done that in the first place, only I was in a hurry and thought Sylvia would help right away. But you wait and see if I don't have my way, in my own home!"

"But" — Mrs. Branstane smiled — "your father?"

At that reference Annabel moved back and sat down on a wide old sofa, and began toying thoughtfully with the folds of her filmy white dress. Suddenly she tossed her head of glorious hair and lifted two brimming eyes to Mrs. Branstane.

For days Annabel had been fretted about the Judge, about his haggard appearance, his laggard air. For weeks he had been distant and unapproachable, in a preoccupation that was unwonted in him.

"I — I hadn't thought of father," the girl said. "Of course I could win him over. But I hate to pester him now. He doesn't look well. Have you noticed it?"

Mrs. Branstane laughed softly, and came and patted Annabel's head. "Good night," she said, and then disappeared. . . .

In the morning Annabel's perplexities over her father resolved themselves into a highly practical devotion to their housekeeper. Since there seemed to

be no other immediate means for her social salvation, Annabel fell to and helped sweeten and lighten her housework, and together they made a lark of Mrs. Branstane's morning duties. And if the present offered no ready means for further service, there certainly was no end to the future plans that Annabel drew up for Mrs. Branstane's behoof. It was all right to give in, but only when one had to.

And so, still once more the world was to be made over, this time by a confident girl.

With the usual results.

All these light-hearted intentions of Annabel, Mrs. Branstane took to her room and filed away seriously. To her the most casual, the most off-hand promise, the merely accidental outburst of generosity, became an iron contract, a Shylock's bond, eternally remembered and eternally bound to fulfilment.

It so happened, moreover, that in still another quarter of the city the regeneration of the world was on foot that morning — again at the practical hands of the young, as might be expected.

Mr. Walker P. Landis, seated in his glass-enclosed private office in his bank in Poplar Street, frowned savagely over a visiting card handed in by his secretary. The paper bore the name of

MR. JOHN SHERIDAN BROOKES

"Tell him I'm out!" he snapped, and turned to his morning correspondence.

Scarcely had he dispatched the annoying intrusion when our friend Sherry presented himself without ceremony within the glass cage, jaunty, debonair, handsome, smartly dressed, and breathing from every

line and from every move of his being the fact of his entire ease of mind.

"How did you get in here!" Landis growled and scowled. Already he was framing a smashing reprimand for his huge doorman.

"I didn't learn to play 'end' for nothing," Sherry smiled.

"Oh, always our 'deah Haw-vud'!" Landis laughed roughly. "Well, what's your business? I may as well tell you I've nothing to lend you."

"I'm going to lend something to you. A bit of advice," Sherry said with invincible good nature, and without invitation seated himself easily in the arm-chair ready for suppliants at the august banker's desk. "I think it will interest you," the boy added, with a forgiving smile.

"I'm sure it won't. I waste no words, and I say, get out."

Sherry leaned forward, more amiably than ever, and said, "You've probably noticed that I spend as little time as possible with you?"

Landis rose. "I said, get out."

"As soon as I possibly can, you may be sure. But business first. Are you going to pull off that dirty little low-down deal on Senator Banks?"

"I don't understand you!"

"You didn't say that as loudly as usual. So you do understand me. Are you going to keep all that property? Or turn it back, as gentlemen do?"

"What I do is not for you, my boy. I've a legal right to that property. And it's my duty to keep it. My duty to the stock-holders. To the widows and orphans —"

"Drop all the nonsense. Are you going to do it?"

"Nothing can stop me if I choose."

"One moment." Sherry edged forward on his chair. "Maybe the law can't stop you. But something else can."

"Not you, certainly! For all you're the great Sherry Brookes. There are new Sherry Brookeses in town, you may as well know!"

"There's only one owner of *The Globe* in town. Perhaps you've heard that I've just bought the paper?"

Landis sat down. And leaned his elbows on his desk. Two red spots, indicating mental activity, had appeared on his prominent cheek-bones, and his grey eyes, planted close together, Sherry observed as he never had before, peered narrowly at his visitor.

"Blackmail, eh?" Landis spoke that out loud and strong.

"No." Sherry likewise spoke out loud and strong. "Publicity."

"Ah, publicity!" Landis tried a touch of irony, albeit in a lower tone. He fiddled with his watch-chain while he thought. His hand trembled. He was in a rage. "You mean that as a threat, I suppose."

"Oh, rot!" Sherry laughed. "I never bother to threaten. That's a waste of time. A waste of courtesy!"

The flush on Landis's face had deepened fairly to the purple of rage. "So?" he sneered in a nasal tone. "I see. The idea is, What are your advertising rates? Isn't it?"

Sherry sighed. "I suppose, when one tackles a rat, one has to put up with a rat. If I followed my instincts I'd have pounded you to a jelly before now.

But I'll say this. You'll get plenty of advertising, and you'll get it free. I'll write it myself. Provided, of course" — he rose — "you supply me with anything to write about. If you think better of your little scheme, I'll let you severely alone. Not because you can frighten me, but because you can't interest me."

Landis also rose from his chair. "Damn your impudence! What brings *you* meddling in old Banks's affairs?"

By an almost imperceptible step Sherry brought himself still closer to Landis and smiled down into his face. "I'd see you in Hades on any account — just for the public good," he said quietly. "It's enough for you that I generously warn you to think things over before you ply your little arts. But if you really want to know, Senator Banks is about to become my father-in-law." And he turned toward the door.

Landis watched him withdraw. "Son-in-law be damned!" he was thinking — thinking of his clever secretary Irvin Crist. And presently his thoughts would have burned their way into appropriate speech.

But Sherry had vanished, rudely, in a breeze of laughter, and hastened away, quite certain of having dealt very effectively and finally with that particular annoyance.

That evening Sherry suffered no surprise as Penning joined him in another roar of laughter when he heard the episode retailed. It was rather the fact of the violence, and the long continuance of Penning's laughter, that brought the surprise to Sherry.

"Oh, well, Socrates!" he finally complained. "I suppose you could have done a heap better!"

"Oh, you've — you've settled the matter!" Pen-

ning discovered he had breath enough to say. "Sherry, my lad" — he shook his head over his friend — even patted the boy's back — and the old irony appeared — "I used to think well of your powers. But now you make me think —"

"Damned pacifist!" Sherry made the highly logical retort.

"Now you make me think of Mr. Roosevelt in the act of preventing a war."

However, Sherry, with a hearty sniff, had thumped out of the room.

Behind him he left Penning in a brown study. "I wonder if Banks—" he mused. And then the final decision, "Oh, Banks can be trusted to take care of himself."

CHAPTER VI

POSSIBLY no form of literature is so eagerly consumed in Rossacre as the liberal space in the local prints consecrated to the movements of "Society." Far from taking affront at the better fortunes of the quality folk — elsewhere too often regarded with dislike and distrust — good Rossacrats are only too proud and too grateful to have by them these personages who do so much to lend interest and incident to life.

Hence the whole town pricked up its ears, about then, when *The Globe* one day announced the intentions of Judge Gayland toward a visit to Old Point Comfort, in the company of his family. For a long time the whole city had wondered at the Judge's weary appearance, and now wondered even more when, at a busy season, with a political campaign already belated, the honoured jurist left home "for a period of rest."

Miss Annabel herself wondered — though Mrs. Branstane did not — why she could not induce her father to travel farther than the Virginia resort, when she had used every persuasion to urge him at least as far as Miami.

For Mrs. Branstane herself, during this period of his rest, the Judge had privately planned an outing in another locality; but Annabel's importunities in the woman's behalf were not to be withstood, and

Mrs. Branstane went along to Old Point, and even shared Miss Annabel's rooms at The Chamberlain.

In their final preparations Mr. Penning naturally made himself invaluable. In a very nice manner, it happened, the whole arrangement fell in with plans of his own. A bit of business in Boston, for some time urgent, might as well have his attention at that convenient season. Thence he was to return to Rossacre in time to open the Gayland mansion and mobilise its servants in time for their return. And in the main this programme was fully observed, though with unexpected variations.

For years it had been a matter of pride with Judge Gayland to visit, each winter and each summer, a new quarter of the globe. This winter, for reasons that will be clear to any political intelligence, he was curtailing his absence and limiting his travels. For now, as Mrs Branstane had more than openly hinted, the Judgeship, once the merest amusement to him, an idle honour, had become a stern necessity to the Gayland income, with its salary of an additional \$4,800. And even so the Judge's plans were going badly.

In the first place the Judge, with his habitual slackness, had let things drift into this first week of October, without a stroke of practical political endeavour in his own behalf. Or it may be, that seeing no one in opposition save an old lawyer, of no great weight and of merely Democratic leanings, the Judge had confidently counted on the compliment of re-election.

In any case, their little outing brought to Mrs. Branstane dangerously intoxicating zephyrs out of Paradise. In Rossacre, where everybody knew the

pedigree of everybody, Mrs. Branstane had found her status as fixed as steel. In the great hotel, in its motley community, Mrs. Branstane met folk on terms of careless equality. And immediately she brightened. Passing casually as a friend of the Gaylands, as she always did in Annabel's calculated introductions, Mrs. Branstane blossomed with all her might. Blossomed actually. Annabel was proud of her vassal's achievements. Turn her over as hopeless? Miss Annabel thought not. It was a thing proved — to Mrs. Branstane doubly proved — that Mrs. Branstane could rise and shine, precisely as she had always suspected she could. And she lost no occasion for pointing this out to the Judge. Certainly it was no fault of hers if he failed to mark the contrast between her estate then and the years of her "slavery" in his house.

"You cad!" she once said to him in private. "Why didn't you bring me here before! Instead of letting me rot in your kitchen! When even Annabel's school-boy friends could see what I am!"

And it may be that, generously, the Judge turned it over in his mind, whether he had been as generous as duty, appropriately garbed as Mrs. Branstane, had demanded.

Whatever his hypothetical qualms over that, there came a day during their visit when all other matters fled his mind. The day when Sherry Brookes's new purchase, *The Globe*, never in its history friendly to Judge Gayland, appeared as usual in the mail — this day bringing a stunning blow. During his absence *The Globe* had been the one real interest of the Judge, with its news of what, politically, was stirring at home. The issue of that afternoon brought him very

amazing information. Editorially it trumpeted, and without previous hint or introduction, that

After due deliberation the friends of the Hon. Andrew Penning have decided to launch his campaign for the nomination for the Judgeship of L—— County. For all they know his candidacy will be irresistible, Mr. Penning's friends undertake it with misgivings. Mr. Penning has steadily — but, they think, mistakenly — objected to the use of his name. Nevertheless —

In a word, Mr. Penning's friends — meaning, of course, Senator Banks — were bent upon braving his displeasure in the public interest. In the affairs of any man there was sure to come a time when the community's need of him transcended any scruples of his own. Mr. Penning's friends felt. . . .

They felt many things, and predicted many more.

Altogether it made a pretty column in *The Globe*. And the later papers that the Judge drew from his mail — and quickly hid from his family — contained as little assurance for him. They all pounded the Penning drum.

Naturally, in all this business, the Judge saw the fine political hand of his friend Senator Banks. In his absence the Senator had seen his opportunity. Whether Penning, and the absence of Penning, had anything to do with the business, Gayland could not or cared not to figure. Nevertheless, and with a practised eye, he could see the dangers for him. Being not altogether a fool, he could diagnose, with unflinching skill, the situation at home.

Everybody in Rossacre was aware of Penning's interest in his daughter. Every one of them would

be enthralled by the drama of Penning's rivalry, voluntary or not, with the man destined to be his father-in-law. And everybody, he knew, would pray, and vote, for the success of the younger man, the romantic hero.

So, with this final and utterly staggering addition, the Judge's problems reached a pitch of confusion no longer to be simplified by the easy expedient of flight. At last it was necessary for him to stand and think. Slowly his habitual deceits of chatter and pleasantry before his family were bound to break down at last.

And so, one evening, near dusk, Annabel trapped him, on the broad piazza of the hotel, a Rossacre newspaper spread over his knee, and his eyes vacantly sweeping the historic roadstead. It happened that the hotel crowd was elsewhere interested, and she kissed him, and crouched down on the floor beside his knees, and joined him in dreamy watch over the bay. For a quarter of an hour, perhaps, they remained so; and then he laid a hand on her head and she raised her glance suddenly, in alarm at his trembling.

"Father!" she cried. "There's no use dissembling any longer. Something is — and something has been — troubling you. What is it?"

She waited for him to speak.

"Don't you think I'm a good enough pal of yours to know? Aren't we brethren and sistern enough for you to tell?" In her ignorance of his difficulties she could still cling to the language of pleasantry.

But the poor man stunned his daughter when he burst into tears.

"Father!" she cried, and clung to his knees. "Oh, you've got to tell me now!"

"Yes," he faltered. "It's come at last. I can't hold in any longer."

When they had controlled themselves the Judge and Annabel wandered out along the parapet of the old Fort, to be alone. Haltingly the father told his daughter — some of it, but not all. Chiefly the financial down-coming. He complained of no one but himself. Of Mrs. Branstane he said not a word. With genuine generosity he was silent on that score. He knew he could never do absolute justice to the woman's claims.

And so he contented himself with "I fear I haven't gauged the world rightly — ever. I haven't managed, somehow, to the best advantage."

"But, father! Look at what *I've* done! Oh, I see it now! And I'll never forgive myself. So that was why you wouldn't give me a greenhouse! Or why you wouldn't let me be a missionary, or a nurse! And how I plagued you for such things! You dear! . . . And how patient you've been! I see it now. . . . That's why you wouldn't go to Coronado Beach and rest. You couldn't! . . . And I am to blame. I and my extravagances. . . . Ah, you haven't been fair to yourself! You've *never* been fair to yourself! You've never had your due. . . . And think how I must have bothered you! And worried you! . . . And you never complained. What a man you are!"

She stopped their slow promenade, and stepped in front of him, and, taking hold of the lapels of his coat, she looked up at him.

"In spite of all," she said, "this is a great day for me. It isn't going to hurt me to come down and live like a sensible person. But no matter what it

cost me, I'd give a thousand times more to know what a man my father is."

The arms slipped about the father's neck, the beautiful head dropped upon his shoulder. "O-oh, I'm so glad to have found you out at last!"

Along the parapet they walked on. From somewhere over Maryland or Pennsylvania another new moon hung pendant and dimly lighted their faces, even as they dimly lit up their lives to each other. In his relief the Judge was almost happy. In a world ordered as this one, he knew, his hunger for love and comprehension might easily have had to die without this sweetness of discovery. Surely this gain was worth what he had lost.

"But why, oh, *why*, didn't you tell us all along!" Annabel once demanded.

And, tingling with the mingled thrill and humiliation of his confession, the Judge wondered indeed why he had not, when the difficult feat had turned out to be so simple after all.

At once, of course, Annabel was prolific in schemes for their triumphant restoration. "Oh, we'll show that town a thing or two!" she declaimed. "The malicious little place! It shan't have a chance to assassinate *you* with its nasty gossip!" . . .

For all that, the principal thing to them both was that, at last, after many empty years, father and daughter had found each other. And for all the pain of it, there was something exalted and sacred to Annabel in that moment. For ever the years of her youth and of her ignorance had slipped away from her and she knew herself to be a woman.

Nevertheless the liabilities of being a true partner with her father in the business of his life were not long to be spared her.

"How lucky it is," the thought occurred to her, "that you still have the Judgeship! It will tide us over so nicely, until we get started again!"

And so the Judge had to tell her the uttermost, the worst news of all. . . .

"That! That too has been worrying you!" she cried then. She stood stock still, there in the gathering darkness, to take this in. "He —. And *he* could come to our house! And be your guest! With that sort of thing in his heart! O-oh!"

In vain the Judge sought to explain that doubtless Mr. Penning, also away from Rossacre, had had nothing to do with this business. Without his knowledge, it was evident, his friends had gone forward on their own responsibility. In any event Mr. Penning had probably no inkling that her father needed, and planned to run for, the Judgeship again. It availed nothing.

Annabel put her hands to her face and blushed for Penning. "He ought to have made sure!" she decided. "To think of it!" she repeated, over and over again.

Then, suddenly, she astounded her comforter and started forward toward the hotel, in a great state of excitement.

"Come on, Dad; come on!" she cried. "We'll show him! If he wants a fight he can have it! I hate that man!" Off over Pennsylvania, or in the general direction of "that man," she shook her small fist. "Br-r-r! I hate him! I hate him!"

The man who had earned the sneers of Rossacre had found his champion at last, who glorified him and his mistaken life till he was obliged to clog her unearned eulogies with a kiss.

"Oh, we'll soon have those cheeks filled out again!"

the girl was gloating. "And you! You!" again she hurled her contempt northward, "I loathe and despise you!"

And not did the poor, bungling masculine mind of the father come to its senses till the daughter, very shaky in her own senses just then, had fallen very limp, in her mixed merriment and grief, in his arms.

The Judge, much frightened, carried her back to the hotel, and they put her to bed in a fever, and had a doctor, and kept her there till the excitement had abated. And a very badly torn Annabel she was.

They quartered Mrs. Branstane elsewhere that night, and gave Annabel the solitude and the sedatives that she pointedly required. The lowered estate that lay before them, the gilding that was gone from their grandeur — that was nothing. The thing that ailed her was something different.

Young things like Annabel, when they love, never deliberately select; they lightly gravitate, they bestow themselves, by some wisdom that is subtler than reason, like the seed that alights where the prodigal breezes leave it, and there glorifies the fortunate spot where it falls. Only, in the human weed there is apt to be mind, and the capacity to be hurt, when the spot where it falls is found to be of rocks and thorns.

So Annabel tossed on her bed that night, in sleepless mortification. Something in her that was very intimate and precious had been outraged. All the rumours she had heard, of "his" prejudices for Sylvia, of his stepping aside for Sherry, all the recollections, all the occasions of her confident trust in his silent but evident honesty, came back to her. And mocked her. She did him full credit, too. After all, it was

clear, he had made the best pretense he could of accepting gracefully what had been — most torturing recollection of all — thrust upon him.

Well — as clocks told the hours — she thought of a way of raising the value of a stuff that she had dispensed too cheaply. It might be that “he” was only stupid. Oh, she was fair to him. Only then, when it was broken, did she measure the love she had had for him, a love that, even in its shame, refused to think altogether ill of its object. So women gild in their minds the image of the unworthy.

Still, even if he were honest in a stupid, lumbering, superficial, masculine sort of way, inwardly, and before a court that decided upon evidence subtler and more telltale than the practical, he had not been honest. He had broken his contract. And so she would go back, and at whatever cost to her pride she would walk boldly before him, and show him she was not to be taken at any such figure as he supposed.

So it was that on the following afternoon, in despite of the doctor’s orders, Annabel insisted upon rising, and commanded their immediate and compendious departure for home. It was only senseless and silly, she argued, their piling up further expense where they were, with such pressing political business at home — not to think of the financial strains which she forebore to mention.

At home the Hon. Andrew Penning that day arrived from his own business in Boston, and allowed himself a deal of concern at the failure of the mails from Virginia. Not a wire, not a note, not even a card, awaited him, with notification of the precise day when he might open the house. Instead,

Berkeley interrupted his belated dinner at the Club, and very seriously confounded him with a request for the keys and the news that the Gaylands would return next morning, a whole five days before their scheduled time.

A little later that evening, as he tried what he could to fill in an evening of misery made all the more acute by the absence of Sherry and the Senator on their hunting excursion, the Hon. Andrew came upon a clue to the various mysteries encompassing him, when, in the Club library, he leafed over the more recent back issues of *The Globe*. A few curious members, alert to the situation and curious to witness the probable capers of the Hon. Andrew when he became alert to it himself, were able to report to their friends his immediate and vehement rush from the Club. And it is a simple matter of record that his bed went another night undisturbed, though perhaps no one is in the secret of the dust he kicked up on the country roads leading away from the small city. Nor of the thoughts he entertained of his friend the Senator.

Whatever his movements on the night before, in the morning the loafing population of Rossacre, accustomed to treat itself to a breath of the outer world by a faithful welcome to all incoming trains, marked the figure of Penning among them in the trainshed easily twenty minutes before the regular arrival of the Limited, threading his way about oblivious to the comment caused by his antic pre-occupation. For everybody knew or easily imagined why he was there.

When at last, with indispensable hiss of steam and clang of bell, the train pulled in, he rushed back to the Pullman as a matter of course. Yet in passing

the last of the day coaches what was his petrification to mark Annabel Gayland struggling down the steps unassisted, with an enormous bag.

"Ah!" he cried, and reached to relieve her.

Down the steps she struggled, one at a time, and before the assembled crowd she stepped aside, though she glanced at him casually, as at any obstruction, and — passed on.

After her plodded her father, without benefit of porter, with a bag of his own. Being also without feminine prejudice, he administered his head in a feeble nod. Only Mrs. Gayland paused and said in her usual manner,

"Why, how d'ye do, Mr. Penning. Aren't you surprised to see us travelling in a common coach? It's some new freak of Annabel's."

Penning, however, had moved away.

"Aren't you coming along with us?" Mrs. Gayland raised her voice, herself now puzzled and seeking to reconcile in her own mind the astonishing mystery of her husband and Annabel rushing ahead, and Penning turning away with such a very odd expression on his face.

Over every act and every word, meanwhile, the crowd grouped about almost audibly indicated its excitement.

"Thank you, no," Penning contrived to stammer, and quickly faded away.

CHAPTER VII

THAT evening many a cup of tea cooled away untasted on Rossacre tables. In gratitude to Mr. Penning. When the public press of the city was of custom a whole day later than common rumour in circulating the most ordinary affairs of the town, half an hour is a liberal allowance for the general spread of this choice news of Penning and Miss Annabel.

Lincoln Avenue, as might be supposed, when it heard the reports, inclined toward conflicting views, divided chiefly according to sex.

"He got what was coming!" a few of the boys argued.

"She's a fool!" the feminine contingent decided.

Milligan Street clove to opinions of its own. "Thot fool gurrl! To trate Mither Penning like thot! Such doin's won't putt many dollars in her faather's bank — nor stringthen his naame at iliction!"

Parker, favourite waiter at the Club, soon had tales to tell of Mr. Penning's indifferent zest at the table; and the boy in his office reported,

"He don't answer nothin' to wot you ast him."

To Rossacre this was every bit as good as a play, in real life, right there in the open. No one had ever presented to Rossacre such a varied interest, so many absorbing problems as Mr. Penning. No one had confirmed so many prophecies, or confounded so many theories. Nobody's existence had been so minutely

studied. No one was so roundly admired, so hotly hated. And even while it hated, Rossacre admired him. He performed such a charitable service; he lent so much incident to life! And by nightfall of that day the whole town was in possession of every smallest detail that had figured — and of a thousand and one details which had not figured — in that dramatic episode centring about the morning train. Like a great audience the little city sat by to watch this spectacle — The Lady or the Judgeship, with Mr. Penning as hero — and even placed bets on the outcome.

Oh, they were stirring days, those of that campaign! Early that October “the situation” opened when the gathering woes of Judge Gayland were augmented by the calamity of the Democratic nomination. Though the one logical nominee for either party, so a sapient press informed the voters, was the Hon. Andrew Penning, sometime mayor of Rossacre, once District Attorney, and always Republican, the Party of Protest, in the plenitude of their wisdom early and brilliantly hit upon the Hon. Ira Gayland for their candidate, known to have been stoutly Democratic at convenient times in the past, though steadfastly Republican in the privacy of the balloting booth.

Loudly did Gayland bewail this ghastly occurrence, which menaced his nomination by the Republicans, and virtually threw the Judgeship into the hands of Penning — if he wanted it. And so, with ever diminishing sleep and appetite, the city watched this race for the Lady or the Judgeship.

Little knots of good Rossacrats began to collect on the street corners, and argue, and bet, and wag their

heads as they faced this solemn duty of selecting the man who should for ten years more faithfully hang their murderers and preside at their fights over wills. Troops of Penning's friends began knocking at his door. Reporters wore a path up the Lincoln Club stairs by day; their editors trod it deeper at even, and tried their powers of persuasion upon the reticent man. Clergymen in their pulpits, especially the Rev. Arthur Wiggin, pointedly prayed for divine interference in this grave matter, and openly advised Providence of their preference in the selection of a just Judge. Senator Banks, Boss Banks, self-constituted political manager to Penning, was never willingly out of earshot of his charge, lest some dread nobleness in Penning should get the upper hand and impel him to withdraw. The poor stout little man ate with the silent Penning, walked with the silent Penning, on his fearful and philosophical wanderings over the early October hills. Freely and cheerfully the Senator perspired, in devotion to his purpose and his pet. He dogged the taciturn man to bed, and gave him no moment in which to harbour a single idea save the eminently sensible one of accepting the Judgeship.

"By gad, Penning!" he would say, reckless as ever with his metaphors, "if you'll just shut your eyes and swallow this one little pill, you've got the Governorship in your pocket right round the corner. In three years you'll be resigning from this little job and taking that. Then a chair in the Senate — the one in Washington, I mean. After that, anything, anything! Why, man alive, they'll snow you under with a perfect avalanche of votes. If you'll only take this little job as a starter, there isn't anything you can't have! All we've got to do, you see, is to get

you out where the people can really have a good look at you. You've been hidden too long. That's what I had in mind in getting up this little affair. You get me?"

To all this Penning listened politely, and smiled.

Of late years he had begun to hate the little city. None was so willing as he to admit what he owed to it. Thither he had come from college, on Sherry Brookes's recommendation, to make full use of it. And dutifully the community had contributed its humble offerings to his superiority. Still, on that very account it now felt a partnership in his fame, and a right to dictate in his affairs. And how could he fairly resent it? In twelve years he had become Rossacre's pet — and Rossacre's prisoner. It reached up and wrapped its pettiness about him. It rendered him homage, and made it impossible for him to accept it. It was always raising the question whether he should be a noble, or a rising, man. "There is a tide," Rossacre quoted, and confidently left the rest to Penning. Forgetting a fact which the poet also neglected to specify — on occasion their tide may be too shocking dirty for the fastidious.

It was these things that Penning pondered on his long walks, or in his rooms, or at his meals.

Indeed, during those weeks, the little metropolis felt as if our terrestrial globe must surely pause and hold its breath till these momentous issues were settled.

Our terrestrial globe, however, under no such compulsion, rolled on. Days passed. All too rapidly for Judge Gayland. And with the passing days rolled the tide which Rossacre summoned Penning to take at the flood.

What mattered it that beyond the tide Penning

caught glimpses of Miss Annabel, with a tottering father to champion, outdoing many of the saints and all of the gods that guard or goad the weak or unworthy? Never did Judge Gayland enter his house, his home-coming figure never appeared in the street in front of it, but his daughter flew to meet him. Never for a moment was he permitted to see her when she was not a very din of cheer and encouragement. Often too her energies found astonishingly practical outlets.

"Oh, father!" she laughed to him, one afternoon, hanging on his arm as they strolled together along the path from the Avenue gateway to their house; "you know our dear friends the Prendergasts? — the Mr. Prendergast who is assistant street commissioner, and is such a horrid Democrat? Well, he's a power in his ward you know, and — and I feel rather confident that he is going to vote for you. That's where Berkeley and I went last evening. I took a big basket of things along —"

"Mercy me! What next, Miss Politician!" the Judge was fain to laugh back.

"Berkeley carried the basket for me to their door, and then waited outside while I went in. It wouldn't have done to hurt Mr. Prendergast's tender feelings with a sight of our butler. And really, I had great luck. It struck me the minute I got in the door that I'd struck the wrong place. The Prendergasts would have been mortally offended by any hint of an offer of assistance. So I quick piped up and told Mrs. Prendergast I had heard of the low estate of the Hennesseys, but I didn't know where they lived, and I thought anyway they might be proud and would be offended at an offer of help — wouldn't Mr. Prender-

gast help me over the difficulty? I said I was a worker for the Y. W. C. A., and that of course we had no business meddling in people's affairs, but that sometimes one did get down on one's luck — it might happen to anybody — and I only wanted to do what I hoped somebody would want to do for me some day if I needed it. And it worked beautifully. I happened to have just the things that Mrs. Prendergast said the Hennesseys needed — though I shouldn't wonder if Mrs. Prendergast took a little commission out of the basket, for her children. But now I'm sure of Mr. Hennessey, too. Because I met Mrs. Hennessey. Have you ever seen Mrs. Hennessey? I'm sure her husband is in the habit of listening to her advice. And so that's two good votes. Isn't it beautiful?"

Long they laughed over Annabel's political activities. And indeed there was a deal that the girl could, and did, do among certain of her father's old and wavering political friends. Wherever she went she carried herself with a sweetness that accomplished more than a trifle to restore the Judge to respect — and often she did this behind a carefully hidden weariness and revulsion.

At home, if Annabel had her griefs — and daily now she was coming into collision with a hundred new small deprivations — she kept them for her pillow at night, or left them locked in her room. Outside her door she trilled good cheer the livelong day. Of evenings she would wheel her father's favoured wing-chair near to the pianoforte, would turn off the lights, save the mellow cluster over his head, and then play him his tunes, or sing him the songs he preferred. She read him the *News*, which favoured

him, and trampled under foot the lukewarm *Globe*, and the *Bulletin* which frankly combated him.

On his own part the Judge did his best to respond to this counterfeit angelhood in his daughter, and often, not to wound her, feigned a difficult gaiety of his own. Yet there were times when he was obliged to excuse himself, and had to leave the room for a space, or hasten down town, as it was easy to do, "on business connected with the campaign," in order to hide away eyes that would fill at the spectacle Annabel made, valiantly striving to tide him over his crisis and blind him to the old order that was vanished for ever.

There was no drug of filial encouragement, no opiate of music and laughter, that could dull the Judge to his worries then. Himself still Judge, there were sharp boundaries to his going out into the political field to harrow it in his own behalf. And so the Judge was alive to his perils at last. They meddled with his sleep and with his appetite, they wrecked his health. Naturally the pity of his thinned cheek, of his halting steps, the lack-lustre of his eye, was not lost upon Annabel — and they were openly remarked by Mrs. Branstane.

Mrs. Branstane might have pitied, and neglected to assert herself, at least until after this troublous campaign. But no such scruples hampered Mrs. Branstane. Her eye, and her tongue as well, were sharpened with a gathering resentment.

Mrs. Branstane was irritated by Annabel's own campaign of inspiriting her father. Mrs. Branstane began to have no Judge to harry — Annabel was forever intruding with her everlasting singing and twitter. Mrs. Branstane's social advancement was not

simply halted, but the failing financial prospects of the family promised her nothing more of that sort in the future. Most annoying of all, the Judge had come to be stubbornly stoical under his housekeeper's sway. Often she found it necessary to speak to him with point indeed, to reach his feelings at all, in the old way.

On the other hand, she shocked him, at times, with some streak of kindness, as she marked what Annabel accomplished by such means.

"Well, Ira!" she said to him, one evening when Mrs. Gayland had gone melancholy and sighing to bed, when Annabel was out with Berkeley on one of her sly errands among the enfranchised poor; "well, Ira! You don't deserve it, but I'm willing — at least I've been thinking of — of drawing some of my little store of money out of the savings-bank — and — and lending it — or *some* of it, to you — since you begin to need it so much. Only, I must have security, of course. It's all I've got, after all these years of drudgery. And Lord knows, you're none too handy about taking care of money. If you go to pieces — and it certainly looks as if you would, Ira! — where would I be? Ho-ow often have I warned you! You must give me security — I've got to be protected. But I know well enough how it will go. My-y goodness, man, where *will* you wind up! You're spending as free as ever. I tell you, Ira Gayland, this has all got to end sometime!"

"Yes," the Judge answered bitterly. He had come to be silent and preoccupied then, except when he was warmed by Annabel's glow. He had ceased to have the smallest missile of invective to heave back at Mrs. Branstane. "Yes," he answered, and looked at her with meaning, "it will end soon enough."

"Ho? Suicide, eh? In case you don't win?"

Mrs. Branstane saw something of novelty, of distinction brought into her life. She caught a vision of herself as a woman for whom a man once had killed himself. And she smiled.

So Mrs. Branstane's money, or the moiety of it that she brought herself to risk on the doubtful issue of the Judge, came, and "went," precisely as Mrs. Branstane had foreseen. It vanished like a snowflake on a warm pane. The worrisome days of suspense dragged on. And worse and worse awry went the Judge's affairs. In competition with the new institution fired by the energies of Walker P. Landis, the bank in which Gayland had lumped most of his holdings reached a crisis in its business. As a national establishment its stockholders were liberally assessed for funds to bolster its tottering foundations; and so the Judge's store of worldly goods was still more seriously depleted. It seemed as if ill luck would never have done with him.

That exposed to Rossacre the very linings of his tattered pride. At last the great gentleman was truly cut down. Now might the tongues wag against him as they had always itched to do. Every boarding-house table in the city buzzed with accurate knowledge of his affairs.

From these bitter stings the poor man sought relief in grog. Many a glass of it he drained in surcease of his sorrows. Some of them he drained in company with voters, in quest of the Judgeship. Many things he did that lost him dignity, lost him friends, lost him votes. Old enemies rose again, with terribly vivid memories. Old stories of his origin were retold. Old scores, old slights came back, to mock him. The whole

tangled snarl he had made of his life descended upon him and wrapped his puzzled and pottering struggles in its web.

Yet in all this curious arrangement of things Ross-acre could see nothing after all but Destiny — Destiny dusting the pathway of Mr. Penning toward the Judgeship.

CHAPTER VIII

IT takes the smaller communities, with their common acquaintances and their easy personal agreements, to arrive at good sense. Rossacre had tried the costly blessings of our great universal primary election, and had learned a quicker way to the same results without the heavy costs of a double test of election for every candidate. By common consent the district resorted to the old-time party convention, on the understanding that, the other formalities having been observed, the choice of the convention should pass as the voice of the electorate at the primary. Hence every breath in Rossacre waited on the outcome of the Republican convention, only a few days away. The entire region, as the great day approached, was licked up to a tremendous pitch of suspense on the point of what Mr. Penning would do with the Judgeship.

Till that time Penning and politics, for all his previous tenure of office, had always combined more as oil and water than as the perfect emulsion. The office had come more or less unsought. Still, when it was unavoidable, as now, Penning could render the devil his due and grip a political opportunity with some degree of mastery. At least once before he had done it. And without doubt he did master the excited Republican convention with the virtuosity which the press, when the pressmen finally understood what he had done, placed to his credit.

There in the ample Court House were gathered the faithful delegates of Republican creed from the entire district. Every man jack of them had adorned his person with a conspicuous Penning button — thoughtfully supplied in advance by Senator Banks. Portraits of Penning were spotted over the walls, with festoonings of flags. One group of Penning enthusiasts, moreover, it may be on alcoholic inspiration, even struck up a Penning song, —

"We want you, Old Penning, yes, we do!"

Cheers for Penning echoed each other round the building. This was no convention, but a ratification meeting, applauding its own wisdom. Senator Banks, as of right, presided, to finish off with suitable flourish the long weeks of his service in behalf of the Republic. In a far corner, a very far corner, sat the Hon. Ira Gayland, looking very old and very ill, more a shadow than a figure to command votes and respect.

Penning, in trim grey, was present, of course, as delegate from the Fourth Ward of Rossacre.

It makes a brief narrative. No one expected of the convention anything more than a perfunctory formality. And it was only that. The balloting began. Theodore Lacy was granted the honour of presenting the name of Andrew Penning. To satisfy the proprieties, Malcolm Wyeth was deputed to present the name of Ira Gayland, as a matter of form, with such account of his claims to the office as his fancy might invent. A few of the usual nobodies received complimentary proposal and the customary scattering vote — a vote of tradition, of testimonial, of burial. In due course the nobodies were voted down, and by degrees the convention edged along toward the business of the afternoon.

Still, what old-fashioned political convention, however firmly made up might be its mind, ever voted at once as it knew it should vote in the final issue, and so went about its business in a business-like manner!

Three ballots were taken on Gayland, each one of them betokening a falling off of his few devoted followers. Coyly the gathering was verging toward the furious stampede, so soon as its conscience was assuaged. Meanwhile Penning himself sat back in amusement and kept tab on the proceedings.

At length he arose, having bided his time, the idol of them all. The whole room rustled with excitement. The gentlemen of the press had their messengers almost toeing the mark like runners in a race, to be away with the great news of the nomination at the fall of the president's gavel.

In a quiet and even casual manner Penning began to speak. He talked on, and talked further, until he had attention focused to his every breath. He opened with a solemn reminder to them all of the importance of the office they might hope to fill. Gracefully, quietly, insensibly, he passed on to a review of the honoured men who had held that office, within the memory of them all. Last of those incumbents, of course, was Ira Gayland, upon whose notable service he dwelt longest of all. His eulogy seemed to be the magnanimous tribute of a victor to the vanquished. And eagerly they quaffed his honeyed words. Indeed the whole gathering — blacksmiths, bartenders, and all the political powers into whose honest hands the fortunes of our Republic are apt to be committed — heard him through in entire appreciation of this hearty praise for a beaten

rival. Everything in Gayland's career that would make pleasant recollection Penning recalled and expanded. And he did it so gracefully, the whole performance was so full of a sort of music, that no one of them marked how subtly he was effacing from memory, from the very face of the earth itself, all record of the existence of any such man as Andrew Penning. With his gift for graceful speech he gave the convention to feel that it was present at some sort of jubilant anniversary of a great and honoured citizen, whose continuance in the Judgeship was the least reward they could accord him for a magnificence of endeavour deserving of infinitely more. Some of the delegates wept, so touched they were by this generosity of a rival — a rival who gradually made it appear that it was he himself who was beaten. And when they were all sufficiently stirred emotionally and were generally off their guard, Penning snapped through a ballot by acclamation, under guise of a mere vote of confidence. And so, before it was jolly well aware of what had happened, the Republican convention found itself committed once again to the fortunes of Ira Gayland, and the session had come to its logical adjournment.

In a daze someone seconded Penning's motion toward that end, and dreamily, as if in a fog, the delegates voted in approval, and then rose and broke into bewildered groups, and finally drifted out into the corridor, scarcely knowing where they were or what to do with the remainder of a long afternoon. In stupefaction the representatives of the press glanced at one another, and then at the clock. At length they too passed out, and sought their desks in their respective offices. There they long fingered

their typewriters ere it suddenly occurred to them that something noteworthy had befallen.

Then the words flew, and in flaming extras they shortly let fall the thunderbolt of their news upon a gaping, an incredulous, and a very much boomed circulation.

At the instigation of the Hon. Andrew Penning the Republicans of L — County had almost unanimously nominated the Hon. Ira Gayland for the Judgeship.

CHAPTER IX

A MONTH later, in November, Gayland was duly re-elected. The result could hardly have been otherwise. Every voter of Rossacre and the surrounding county owed it as applause to the most romantic episode in the history of the region to see that nothing should occur to spoil it. Indeed Gayland's selection at the polls was, as at the convention, almost unanimous.

Cleverly Penning had kept them all in suspense just long enough to forestall the promotion of any other rival.

And for nearly a week Senator Banks was kept to his bed, with a severe case of chagrin, disguised as a cold.

The metropolis itself, for a day or two, thrilled at this act of heroic self-denial. Penning had stirred a latent fibre of romance in them all. Not a voter among them all but wished he himself were the central figure of a similar situation. Then the hard practical sense which animates so many of our dear people returned and began to laugh at Penning for a sentimental ninny, a snivelling fool who had tossed away a whole political future to tickle and impress a chit of a girl.

In the Gayland household this abnegation on the part of Mr. Penning was quite variously viewed. Being people of spirit, the Gaylands received Mr. Penning's unsolicited benefaction with sentiments of indifference. What Miss Annabel herself perhaps thought, very secretly, of this remarkable case of

immolation, what mere man could hope to excogitate from the haughty tossings of her head with which she greeted any mention of Mr. Penning's name? Not but that mention of Mr. Penning was the frequent pleasure of Mrs. Gayland.

"Eh-eh, Annabel," that good lady once said, "how you have worried your poor mother! You'll be the death of me, one of these days. This last folly of yours is the worst." Her tears came freely as she mourned. "It has broken my heart, so it has. Didn't I plead and plead with you not to be so rude and harsh to Mr. Penning? But you would have your way. He would have been fine for you — fine for us all. All the girls were jealous of you. Now how they will laugh! He won't come here any more, see if he does. Just see what you've thrown away. I heard Mr. Lacy himself say he might be President some day. Think of that! It's shameful of you, that's what it is. It's a judgment on us all, for our wickedness, I know it is."

It might be said that for the first time in his life Judge Gayland was able to share the views of his wife, on this subject of Mr. Penning, though he took pains to share them only in the privacy of the closet. For the rest of the time he knew women well enough to have learned that, to keep peace with the wonderful creatures, it is sometimes advisable to avoid certain topics of conversation that seem to spread irritation, for reasons in the keeping of God alone.

For instance, one evening at the dinner table, Miss Annabel objected,

"For the life of me I don't see why everybody has to praise Mr. Penning every minute of the day! He did nothing but what any self-respecting man

would be glad to do. Father was the very making of him. Why *shouldn't* he defer to father! And not make such a to-do as he does!"

At that Annabel's father resolved that the syllables of Penning's name should never more be trolled in his daughter's hearing — and so straightway impaled himself upon the tongue of her disapproval.

On another evening Annabel scolded, — "Well, I do declare, father! Here you are, safe in the Judgeship again, and you've never so much as thanked Mr. Penning, to my positive knowledge. I don't believe you've even spoken to him on the street. . . . Not, of course, that it's anything to me!"

These things do cast a pitiless glare upon the feminine character.

For himself, Penning lived on without seeing any of the Gayland connection, save only Mrs. Branstane, whom he passed occasionally on the street, and in his habitual abstraction recognised only in time to slip in a quick nod and lift of his hat. The other Gaylands it was easy enough to miss, for they kept themselves pretty much from public view.

For a week or more the town waited for the spectacle of Annabel Gayland's melting and becoming reconciliation with her former adorer; and when it continued to be withheld, only laughed the more at Penning for his pains.

On his own part the young notable disconcerted all observers with his entire composure. Serenely he tried with his toe the newly formed films of ice in the gutters, went about his work, played auction at the Club, and generally, by his manner, invited all and sundry to visit the devil.

With that he began to excite not amusement but

wonder. Having created something a bit beyond a welcome sensation, he was treating them now to an actual mystery. The political wiseacres he baffled no less than the most ingenious gossips. Even the sensible were nonplussed. To their immense gratification, of course. Nothing quite like it had ever occurred there before.

Nothing quite like it, certainly, had ever occurred to Senator Banks. This curious performance, which transcended any power of his to grasp, he watched with the sentiment of a child bereaved of an escaping balloon. Almost ill of his chagrin and of his alarm for the mental stability of his friend, weary of the knowing theorists, and thoroughly exasperated by Penning's ironic foolery in response to all hints for an explanation, the Senator even resorted to Sherry Brookes, whose rascality he hoped might be relieved by some lingering glimmer of intelligence.

And there resulted one of those accidents of the tongue which sometimes pass for bursts of genius.

Sherry, in his pathetic endeavour at the experiment of work, as a means of impressing an unwilling father-in-law, had set up a cot in his newspaper office, ordered his meals sent in, and mocked even the blandishments of golf. The Senator found him one morning with his attention evenly divided between a cup of rapidly cooling coffee and an editorial thunderbolt for his morrow's paper.

"Ahem!" the Senator was obliged to cough as he ventured to occupy a chair, rather amused nevertheless as the young rascal went on with his writing and let him wait. It wasn't often that Sherry found the Senator in the attitude of the suppliant, and he meant to make the most of it.

"Well?" he answered. "What is it?" But when he finally looked up from his writing he leaped to his feet in feigned surprise, and added, "Why, good morning, Senator! To what do I owe this honour of a visit from you, sir?"

The Senator stepped quickly to a chair beside Sherry's desk, leaned over it, and whispered,

"What's the matter with Penning?"

"With Penning? Nothing's the matter with Pen."

"Yes, but what's the *matter* with him!"

What was the matter with Penning had given Sherry himself some annoyance, and certainly more thought than he was accustomed to. And in sheer inability to think of anything more intelligent to say, his lips almost automatically framed the shrewdest observation that had ever visited them.

"Well," he laughed, waiting for the words to happen, "you really don't suppose old Pen's going to bury himself here in any little chore like the Judgeship, do you?"

The Senator shot to his feet. And beamed. And stuttered. "Why — really, I —"

While the Senator was fumbling for speech suited to his astonishment, Sherry, seeing that he had said something important, began to enlarge.

"In my opinion, Senator" — he cocked his head back judicially — "our friend Penning has just scored one of the biggest hits of his career."

"Good gracious! You mean —?"

"Sit down, Senator." There was no limit now to Sherry's graciousness. "That man Penning knows his own business, if any man does. God knows what he's really got his eye on. I don't. He takes no one into his confidence. But I'm satisfied now that he

doesn't intend to bother with the little Judgeship. And" — Sherry coolly relit a neglected pipe — "I think you'll find that what he has done will boom him better than anything else he could have done." He watched a blue cloud issue from his lips by way of a period.

"But, how —"

"You know how he's got the town guessing? Well, pretty soon when he does set out after — after whatever it is that he wants, the town will make up to him. It will see how gently he has let it down. And —"

"But that will finish him for sure!"

"That will increase everybody's respect for his powers. They'll see —. Don't *you* see what will happen?"

Sherry had made a great discovery — a way to impress the Senator, by praise of Penning; and he strung it out to the utmost.

"Everybody will see that Pen is a bigger man even than they thought him. They'll be prouder of him than ever. And so there's *one* solid backing he can count on for whatever it is that he does want. You see?"

"My stars!" the Senator was gasping, like one cured by a miracle, like one converted from sin. He had taken to pacing the floor feverishly, flapping his hat in his hands behind his back. "My stars!" he returned to Sherry's desk. "Young man, do you *mean* that? Do you *believe* it?"

"Oh, I've thought it all along!"

"See here!" the Senator made a promising stab into his purse pocket. "Tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a hundred dollars if you'll just — sort of

embody that in a piece for your paper. Write it out nice and smooth, and I'll send you a cheque."

"Oh," Sherry loftily lied in declining, "it's written already, for nothing. I'm not to be bought, you know. But there's something —"

"Yes, I know!" the Senator anticipated.

"— else you can let me do for you."

The Senator was fooled by the clever phrasing, but still suspicious. "What's that?" he said.

"Let me marry your daughter," said Sherry.

"I will not," said the Senator.

CHAPTER X

THE new proprietor and editor of *The Globe* newspaper, whatever the fortunes of his effort to provide Senator Banks with a son-in-law, fared better with his other act of charity. Precisely as the Senator wished, his piece for the paper was duly composed, duly published, and fell with the desired effect.

As by lightning flash the mystery of Penning was cleared. Dutifully the town accepted Sherry's reading. A bold, astute design was conceded to lurk behind the surface ninnyism of Penning. Precisely as Sherry foresaw, they all conceived a new respect for the silent, inscrutable fellow. Instantly he was of the stuff that Governors are fashioned from. There was no knowing on what exalted station he had fixed his eye.

"Far be it from me to advise you now, Penning," Senator Banks said, in touching humility, in beaming pride, on his prompt visit to the young lawyer's office. "I'm just going to stand by and watch you pass on. You're too much for me."

Others ventured now to halt Penning on the street and offer their congratulations to the man who had been made plain to them.

Mrs. Branstane was among those whose felicitations had been released and put in order.

"Oh, Mr. Penning!" she said, as she caught him one morning awaiting a car on a corner, shaking his

hand, to his perplexity. "I just want to tell how grand I think you've been. Yes, just — well — grand! That was a noble act you did. It's a shame no one of the Gaylands has had the grace to thank you for it. But *I* say it was grand, that's what it was."

There Mrs. Branstane stepped closer, and spoke with the smile of one conscious of being at home with the intricate machinery of human motive. "And you didn't fool me, either — oh, no! *I* saw all along what made you do it. And it was grand, that's what it was. And I want to tell you that few men I know would have done it."

She drew back, and waited for submerged and timid worth to come forth and bask in the warmth of appreciation.

"Oh! Really! Thank you so much, ma'am!" Penning stuttered, taken off his guard by the effusion and rather amused by the patronage. "It's awfully good of you!" And, with his car bowling along, and with nothing else handy on his tongue to say, he boarded the car, with a lift of his hat.

"Well!" Mrs. Branstane blazed, as she watched the spectacle of his leaving. After such hearty encouragement she felt entitled to a half hour's exchange of confidences. "I declare! The airs that man gives himself!" She tossed her head and curled her lips.

Then Mrs. Branstane herself bustled along, with heated thoughts.

CHAPTER XI

ONE morning, toward the close of that November, Senator Banks had a lingering glance into his bath-room mirror, at the face which he had just finished shaving, and wondered whether it was advancing age that accounted for his gathering feeling of powerlessness. It was the morning when he had decided that Sylvia and her mother were not, and Sylvia's mother had decided that they were, to journey with Sheridan Brookes to see Harvard's annual game with Yale at football — this year at Cambridge.

However, when the Senator came to see the trio off at the train, and really faced the issue, his objections were, to his infinite disgust, by no means so violent as he had planned and wished them to be. After all, the journey was not necessarily in violation of his iron edict that Sherry was not to be with Sylvia except in a crowd. And the Senator, in the end, was not merely relieved, he was amused, by the reflection that Sylvia, being ushered out into the great crowd, was in the way of discovering for herself that there were other young men in the world besides Sherry Brookes. Above all the Senator was not averse to having Sherry thus pay the bills for his own downfall. And so, on that November morn, they set off for Cambridge, and the Senator repaired to his office, on one of his own street-cars, highly pleased with having so neatly finished off the pestilential Sherry.

But on the evening of that same day another of

the Senator's street-cars bore Mrs. Branstane destined for a village three or four miles outside of Rossacre. In the darkness at the end of the line an automobile lay in waiting. Seated at the wheel was a figure so heavily muffled and disguised that Mrs. Branstane was instantly assured of its identity.

Without waste of a word of greeting she quickly opened the door and slipped into the seat beside the wheel. Even as she latched the door the clutch was thrown and the car itself started away as if its movements too were incidents in a preconceived plan. The road itself seemed to have been smoothly frozen aforethought.

Later still, by an hour and a half, in an upper room in a comfortable little inn on the outskirts of the village, along the road which the more adventurous Rossacre motorists were accustomed to follow on their infrequent essays toward Philadelphia, Mr. Landis, divested of his furry habilaments, was reaching across a table littered with empty dishes.

"Damned good stuff, I will say!" he was laughing. "Pity you didn't pinch a second bottle from the old guy. He knows a good thing when he sees it — if he sees it before I do! What's the name of it?" He examined the label before pouring another glass for himself.

Having drained the glass he tilted the bottle again, and even drew from his pocket a pencil and memorandum, and methodically jotted down the brand of the port.

"Good enough to pass out to anybody. I've got to remember it," he said. And as Mrs. Branstane hungrily watched him he drained the last drop of the tawny fluid.

"Well!" he said on, smacking his lips and reflectively choosing a cigar from a leather case. "Now to business. With the little pup Brookes out of the way, shall I do it? It's just what we've been waiting for. Eh?" Blowing a cloud of smoke across the table, he leaned after it, coming to rest with his elbows on the cloth. "Not but what I'd do it, Brookes or no Brookes. He can't scare me."

Mrs. Branstane was leaning backward, it seemed a little wearily, against the high backed, green stained settle on her own side of the alcove. She even looked away as she answered, "I've already told you what *I'd* do!"

"Yes, I know," Landis said, his lips curling about his cigar and over the remark he was on the point of making. "You say that because you're peeved at the Bankses for not inviting you to their spread. The way you bragged! And you count on your uncle Dudley to pull off a little revenge for you. Isn't that it?"

Mrs. Branstane's lip, at that point, curled, for any reply.

"Oh, come now, sweetey! You really mean it? Shall I do it?"

"Do I ever say anything I don't mean?" Mrs. Branstane evaded, blushing nevertheless at having been read so accurately.

Landis removed his cigar in order to smile in real earnest, in real pride. "By heavens, little girl!" he chuckled. "Don't believe you ever do! By ginger, you've got the nerve, that's what you have! Just wait till I can shake the little old hen at home. If you and I don't make things hum, then I'm all fozzled! But say, now" — his eyes fell again into

their shrewd glance of measurement, of calculation — “you really think I can get away with it, do you? It’ll make an awful stew, remember. Even without Brookes to help it along.”

“For a day or two, maybe.” Mrs. Branstane twisted a ring on her finger, somewhat impatiently.

“Well — do you really think Sherry will have the nerve to print a story in his paper, the way he says? Or was he just bluffing? — He can’t bluff me, by heck. I’ll do it just *because* of that puppy.”

“Oh, let him print.”

“Print and be blowed, eh?”

“My dear Walker!” Mrs. Branstane studied him for a moment in amusement. “Won’t you have the money?” she finished quietly.

Walker brought his fist down on the table and regarded her with beaming admiration. “Ain’t it the only thing in the world!” he philosophised, bathing in this fount of perfect sympathy. And expanded, as one will when he is sure of appreciation. And even repeated the remark. While the amusement deepened on Mrs. Branstane’s face — rather handsome then, with the handsomeness that just such men may admire at just such times in just such places.

“You’d really take the shot, then, eh?”

Long ago Landis had determined to “take the shot,” but he wanted to prolong the suspense, and emphasise the risk he was taking, and he admired for his bravado. “You’d really take the shot?”

“Oh, my dear man!”

“Well, then!” Landis drained the last swallow in his glass, unaware that Mrs. Branstane was already reaching for her gloves. “Here goes, then! I’m

doing it for you," he chuckled, looking up at the ceiling, rather fascinated by the spectacle of himself as a man of nerve and decision. "But I give you my word, little girl, there 'll be one awful stew, remember that! You know" — he returned to earth again — "I kind of like that fellow Sherry? Wish I had him for my secretary, instead of that snivelling deacon, Crist. Sherry and I'd get on. That fellow's got the nerve, I tell you. What you doing?" he suddenly observed of Mrs. Branstane's now obvious preparations for leaving. She was smoothing out the sleeves of her heavy velvet coat. "Quit that, now!" he admonished. "It's early to be going home!"

"Time to be getting back, Walker."

"Oh, tut, tut! Come on. Stick around a little. Hang it, you and I don't get together more than twice a month these times. What's the matter? Going to prayer-meeting at this hour of the night?" he tried a clumsy pleasantry.

"Time to be going, Walker."

"Aw, just an hour more. Come on."

"If I'm not back by ten o'clock they 'll wonder where I've been. . . . They may *ask*."

"It's none of their damned business. Tell 'em so!"

"My dear Walker!" Without his assistance Mrs. Branstane had wriggled into her coat, and now was buttoning it under her tilted and rather pretty rounded chin. "That's where you fall down, if you 'll let me say so. One must be regular. It pays. A man who wants to be another Rockefeller ought to join the church. It's good business." She was on the point of adding something to her homily, but thought better of it, and said instead, "Come on,

now. Get into your coat. Everybody knows everybody else in this hole, and there's no knowing when somebody may butt in here and see us. You ought to know that."

"By George, Nellie!" Landis was unable to restrain his admiration. Even while he writhed into his heavy fur coat he kept his eye fixed upon her. "You're some slick article and no mistake about that!"

She was leading the way now, and he was hurriedly following her out of their alcove, and down the stairs, both of them heavily muffled, on their way to his motor in the yard behind the inn. There in the streaked rays from his own and the lamps of half a dozen other cars, he tucked her in and pinched her knee as he tucked a robe across it. And in a moment Landis had turned the wheel in the direction of Rossacre.

For a space they rode in silence behind the wedge of light from their lamps that split the cool darkness. At least Mrs. Branstane observed a decent respect for the grandeur of the starry gloom.

Mr. Landis rather observed a decent respect for the grandeur that was Landis. "But say!" he chuckled, still full of the great subject of himself. "Won't there be a stew, though, when I spring that trap!"

"Stew!" Mrs. Branstane sniffed. "What language you do use!"

"Gee, but you're fussy! What's the matter to-night?" He glanced at her indulgently. "Well, anyway, you know what I mean."

As they approached the edge of town he throttled down and came to a halt under the slightly deepened shadow of a clump of leafless trees.

"What's the matter? Forgot something?" Mrs. Branstane queried.

"Yes. A kiss."

She drew away.

"Just one," he pleaded. "Last one for a week, little girl! Come on!" And when Mrs. Branstane yielded, slowly, he started on again. "That's something like!" he said.

Safely home, Mrs. Branstane observed to her mirror, later that night, what she had prudently withheld from Landis. "Such nails!" she said. And laughed. "And why doesn't he have his hair cut once in a while!" And then she crept into bed.

CHAPTER XII

A GAINST these flowers of speech Sherry Brookes was matching a few of his own that same night, though some distance away.

They were at dinner in Boston at the Copley-Plaza, where Sherry had firmly established Mrs. Banks and Sylvia in a pretty suite; and it would make a nice psychological calculation which of the three was deriving the supreme of satisfaction from this adventure. To Sylvia it was a venture into wonderland. Not but that she had travelled too, with her parents. Only that the Senator's reputation had not, in point of truth, permeated the country to any extent, outside his native State, and though his means were ample, they had never got more than they paid for. This was something different.

The Senator had counted upon Sylvia's discovery that there were other bright young men in the wide world than Sherry Brookes, and this discovery Sylvia dutifully made. The grand occasion of the Yale game had gathered, as it always does, a glittering collection of notables of every possible variety, and Sylvia could never have answered the query whether she was the more amazed or the more delighted with the number that Sherry knew, and proudly presented to her mother and herself. Their dinner was lengthened to twice its normal period by Sherry's constant visits to other tables, to bring back ex-football captains, or members of Wall Street

banking firms, or somebody who had been abroad doing something of ponderous importance in the diplomatic service. Or they first saw Sherry for themselves, and rushed to his table. There seemed to be no end to his brilliant acquaintance. And no end to their noisy delight at seeing him again. It was —

"Hello, you little old thing! It wets my eyes to see you again!" from some young devil as handsome as Sherry. Or —

"Sherry, this *is* luck! You're just the man we need. You've got to drop everything and come and fly with us. We're dippy on aviation. Come on, now. I'll see you about it after the game. Got a machine for you all ready."

Even dashing and imposing grey-haired old grads knew Sherry, gentlemen of the very highest importance. One of them completely captivated Mrs. Banks, bringing them united attention with his rush from a far corner, waving his napkin.

"Sherry!" He grasped both of Sherry's hands. "Tickled to death to see you! Now mind, you're coming back home with me. Haven't had a good roar since you left us last time. And Ethel losing flesh all the time! Now mind. How are you betting on the score?" . . .

The dinner had not proceeded beyond the fish, in fact, before Sylvia, and her mother, too, had truly made a discovery.

The discovery of John Sheridan Brookes.

And other discoveries still. Half of the hubbub about their table was occasioned more by Sylvia than by Sherry. Arrayed in one of the confections purposely ordered in New York against this event, Sylvia was radiantly — no, appallingly — beautiful.

The giddy and vociferous good cheer about her, the bursts of Yale and Harvard cheering, the consciousness of her just place among the handsome and gorgeously gowned women there, had painted an extra tint on Sylvia's cheek, lit a new sparkle in her eye, and constantly parted her lips in a smile of the gayest and frankest delight. Occasionally the smile was paid to Sherry, in coin of appreciation. Other women forgot to be jealous, she was so candidly, winningly delighted. Men stared at her openly, gazed at her furtively, and forgot to cheer as they looked.

As for Sherry, his pride would have made the peacock hang his head.

More excitement later at the theatre, where a music-comedy made what show it might against unoccasioned, irrepressible bursts of applause and cheering.

Then the game next day, when they rattled out to Soldiers Field in a taxi stuffed with crimson chrysanthemums, and furs, and rugs, and Mrs. Banks, and Sylvia and Sherry.

Thanks to his past performances on the football field, Sherry had been blessed by the miracle of three best seats in the Stadium, down among other famous players of yore, everywhere greeted by them with vehement enthusiasm. And there was more staring — at Sherry first. Then, chiefly, the stares rested with Sylvia. Men about them wondered to themselves who could be that lucky dog with the popularity and the devilish pretty girl. And after the game Sherry laid it on even thicker, and took them to the Lampoon building, and, as a former member of the staff, showed them about it, in company with the wives

and daughters of Governors and United States Senators and Ambassadors, and treated them to tea, and let Mrs. Banks receive what impressions she pleased.

Which she most emphatically did. Sherry had scored with Mrs. Banks unmistakably enough.

Certainly he scored more than either team on the field, and yet the remarkable fact has to be recorded that he saw scarcely a dozen plays in the game. They served only the shrewd end he had in view, and it was fully an hour after they had left the Stadium before he knew the score with exactitude.

Shrewdly he had seated himself between Mrs. Banks and Sylvia, in order the more impartially to dispense his explanations, and with the first roar that broke from the Yale side, as the Yale team pranced into the great loop, he said in Sylvia's ear,

"Guess this is crowd enough to suit your father, what? He wants us to be chaperoned by all creation. This is as near as I can come to it. But look at that team, will you!" The Yale men were rehearsing their plays, and Sherry's mind had slipped for a moment, by habit, into football. "They're beaten already, before the whistle blows. They know it. They'll fumble from nervousness, and lose a touch-down in the first five minutes. You watch and see. While," he added, "I watch you!"

"Hush, Sherry! For heaven's sake!" Sylvia cautioned, for the cheering had suddenly died and left Sherry's final words to be overheard by those about them. A few women on the tier below turned round to see who it was had spoken, and Sherry was driven back to football.

"The wind, you see, is from the open end of the Stadium. Now, if Harvard wins the toss, watch

Mahan pick the windward half, and kick on the first snap of the ball. He knows he's better than Guernsey — and isn't scared, to boot. And —" for now Yale let go another cheer — "and I love you, Sylvia, and you've *got* to take me. I brought you all the way up here where there's the only chance I've got to tell you."

The cheer subsided, and he continued soberly,

"Harvard will box Guernsey —"

"Do they have boxing in football?" Mrs. Banks's inquiry drew a general laugh.

"I mean, they'll surround him at every chance." Sherry was imperturbably patient. "He's Yale's best punter. They won't give him a chance to play his game. Hello, Buck!" he broke off, chiefly for Mrs. Banks's benefit, to shout to a coach parading along the side lines. "And if Guernsey should — accidentally, you know — get crippled, it's Good-bye, Yale!" he ended in Sylvia's direction, while neighbouring spectators cocked their ears to catch more of this clearly expert discourse. "They know they're licked," he laid it on for his auditors' behoof. "But I admire the devils. They die hard. Yes," — as a song broke out — "that's the 'Undertaker' thing. How did it originate? Oh, I must tell you." And he did.

But already Sherry had said enough, by word and manner, to let half a hundred people about him in on his secret. Every minute or two they stole sly glances at the blushing Sylvia, or craned their necks to see how he was progressing, and in their hearts wished him luck.

Suddenly the air was rent by a thunderous roar. The Harvard team had appeared. After a brief

contribution to it, Sherry as suddenly resumed his own efforts toward a goal.

"Sylvia," he leaned toward her to say in her ear, "I had to bring you nearly a thousand miles to the one place where I can tell you how much I love you. Now, by heavens, while the cheering lasts, I'm going to tell you!"

Hence it was that the most utterly crimson thing among all the Harvard emblems that day was the loveliness that was Sylvia Banks.

Presently Yale flowered forth into another song, but the volume of sound was not perfectly adapted to Sherry's uses, and he was obliged to wait for a lyrical outburst from the whole Harvard stand. Then Sherry said,

"There are forty-two thousand people in this bunch, Sylvia. Come from all parts of the United States. And you're the sweetest thing of them all. You'd be that if I took you where there were forty-two million! And I'm the proudest man in forty-two million! See how they turn to stare at you. Think I'd swap places to-day with the Harvard captain? I rather think not! And this is the way it's going to be as long as you live — you and I live. Take me or not, I'm always going to be deathly anxious to be in your company — just all the everlasting time. But take me. It'll save you so much bother! And save me —"

The song had ceased. A hush fell over the whole Rossacre of people there assembled, as the two captains and the proper official strode to the middle of the field and flipped a coin for the choice of goals. And a deafening roar arose as Mahan indicated by a sweep of his arm his winning of the toss and his

geographical preference. The Yale frogs promptly fell into their Aristophanesian croaking, Harvard into its "Rahs," and Sherry observed, into a pretty ear:

"Funny, isn't it! Harvard doesn't know it, but it's cheering expressly for me!"

Barely had he got it said, and Sylvia her "Hush, Sherry! Somebody will *hear* you!" when another hush intruded as the ball was tee'd in mid-field, the whistle blew, and the game was on.

Sherry's game was on.

As he had predicted, Harvard kicked at once, but Yale, making a fair catch, started a series of rushes that carried the ball breathlessly close to the Harvard goal line. In the records of the game it stands as one of the few Yale spurts of that particular meeting, but it kept the Harvard stand breathless and silent, and the only vocal outcry came from the Yale side — and from there came faintly, in sheer surprise.

"Oh, the boobs! Oh, the beggars! Watch for a fumble!" Sherry was shouting, to the Harvard team if to anyone in particular.

It happened, however, that though Guernsey of Yale caught the ball, two Harvard men caught Guernsey. Weary from heroic endeavours that won from Princeton the Saturday before, he was unequal to the stiff tackles, and lay on the ground while mothers groaned. The ball, meanwhile, was being flattened under the weight of a Harvard man. Sherry's prediction of a fumble had come true. And in a minute more the formidable Guernsey was limping from the field, Mahan had kicked marvellously far and out of danger, and the Harvard side burst into a convenient roar.

Immediately Sherry was exulting in Sylvia's ear,

"O-oh, thank God for Guernsey! He's an awful nice fellow. I know him. But he's never been a better fellow than now. He's given me a cheer. I can talk to you at last. Every one of the thousand miles between this and Rossacre is worth waiting a thousand years for just this. And I'm lucky to have it now. I'd travel a million miles to have this chance. You dear! There isn't a girl here — or in the world — as lovely and sweet as you. I'd back you against the Queen of Sheba. Oh, Lord, there's the cheer dying out, just when I've got so much to say! *Go it, Harvard!*" he finished, as a blind to Mrs. Banks, while dozens round about turned to admire this stalwart lung enlisted for Harvard.

Thence on, however, better fortune fell to Sherry. The early rushes were seen to be Yale's only serious assault upon the game that year. After that the noise came chiefly from the nearby Harvard cheering section, and Sherry's asides to Sylvia were correspondingly multiplied.

"Think of it, Sylvia!" he said at the first opportunity, "the pick of the country fights to get in here. And you're the pick of the pick. There isn't a woman here who wouldn't be jealous if she saw you. There isn't a man here who wouldn't swap what he's got for you. I know that's pretty coarse love talk. The sweet sonnets don't come in my line. All the same, the best word-slinger in all this crowd, or in all the world, couldn't love you more than I do."

There, while she murmured confused protests, and even sought to seal his lips with her hand, he tried to renew the cheer with his incantation of "Hawvud!"

Soon again Mahan fetched another phenomenally long kick, and again the obedient cheer arose.

"I know, Sylvia," the waiting Sherry promptly made use of it, "your ideal of a lover is a happy combination of Shakespeare, Napoleon and John D. Rockefeller. That's every girl's ideal in these days. I don't blame 'em. But really, you'll find me a pretty fair substitute. I'm every one of those fellows by intention, at least. And in a way I'm a lot better. Fellows like that are absorbed in themselves. *I'm* absorbed in you. And always will be. Oh, you can't possibly turn me down now, Sylvia. Look how sober I am. And a worship like mine doesn't grow on every bush. Every rose-bush, I mean. You know what I mean. Damn, I wish sometimes I *were* a poet. I never knew poetry could be so convenient. Really *useful*. But if I were the greatest poet that ever lived, I couldn't tell you all that I've got in me to say. There, how was that! Oh, damn!" he complained suddenly, as the cheer died down. "Just when I was really getting started!"

Between the halves he ushered Sylvia like a princess to the coffee stands under the arched entrances. There, for one thing, she heard enough of complaint from the holders of other seats to understand by what grace of importance she was sitting in the best. Another token of Sherry's unsuspected powers.

Meanwhile Sherry himself talked on. "Sylvia," he exulted, "you've got to admit that this is all regular. I'm taking no advantage of your Dad. He wants us to be always in a crowd. Well, here's crowd enough, even for him. And it can't prevent me — *nothing* can prevent me — from telling you that I love you. I'd invent some way of telling you, if I died for it. The only thing that stops me is my stupid tongue. I know now why knights of old used

to like to die for their ladies. The poet has got some means of relief. He can spout. The rest of us can only die!"

They were away behind one of the great outer columns, and Sherry was speaking like a rapid-fire gun, to make the most of this extra opportunity. The time was short, the circumstance fleeting.

Modestly, but vainly, Sylvia sought to protest, to stay him. Yet it was only a faithful and formal observation of a canon of her sex — to flee, or make pretense of flight, for at least a moment, before the pursuing male. For all this flattery, the subtle and the spoken, was overwhelming and resistless.

Certainly Mrs. Banks had so decided. Back in her seat Mrs. Banks had swelled with pride of her daughter till, if she could have expressed it physically, she would have filled the dimensions of the Stadium. Neither had she forgot Sherry's part in providing her with so many agreeable sensations. In Rossacre Sherry had appeared to her "wild." Here, in the great world, wildness, Mrs. Banks could see, being no fool herself, was not a stigma but something of a distinction. Here people openly admired the spirit of such a fellow. All he needed was a touch of feminine restraint. And Mrs. Banks had privately found, not far from her own soul, just the precise fount of that needed commodity. Far from resisting him further, Mrs. Banks would now have quashed any resistance on the part of Sherry, had any such burglar of a thought gained entrance to his mind.

That was why Mrs. Banks decided to stay comfortably in her seat — and leave matters to take their course.

Which they did.

Sylvia was saying little — a good deal less than she thought. Nothing had been lost upon Sylvia. Least of all Sherry's novel and thoroughly typical method of pressing his suit. Sylvia too might look over the beauties there, and wonder how many would have disdained the attentions that she was receiving.

And so she poured forth a little symphony of laughter, and half-hearted cautions, and smiles and sparkles of the eye. It was all she might permit herself. Not being a Sherry herself, she was fearful of betraying too much, with even her eyes.

With Sherry it was different. With his eyes he was saying as much as with his tongue, if that is possible.

"Sylvia" — the words were coming between sips of the gratefully hot coffee — "I know you think I've been a devil. You shrink from me. Perhaps any girl would. But I've never been vicious. I'm not exactly — smudged, you know. You believe that, don't you? And listen to every word I say. Do me that favour. Because I've got it from Penning, and I've committed it to memory. Don't you think that a fellow like me, who has been about everywhere, is the one best able to value a truly wonderful girl? Nobody knows so well as I do how lovely and good you are. You see?"

"Oh, really, you mustn't, Sherry. Not — not here."

"If not here, then where, pray! No, it's true, Sylvia. Your holy saints, when they set out after a girl, are just plain starved ravening beasts. They'd tell any girl they loved her. But I know what I'm talking about. Don't you see? Why, Sylvia, dear, I've scarcely ever touched your hand. That's how

I admire and respect your wonderful self. Some day, when we're older, I'm going to tell you of the others that spare you the worst in men. Poor creatures, there's another side to them, too. But you — you are like a wonderful picture or statue, so rare that one would fight to preserve it, for the few of us that really know what beauty is. You see, dear, you seem so high to me, because I look up from such a depth. I've burned out all the dross in myself. I've got no interest in you but just honest worship. Truly I ought not to say such things into your ears. But it's the only way to make you understand. And I'm not going to sail under false colours. Not even in the matter of spouting all this. It's true that I got the words of it from Penning, but I've always had the ideas for myself. He's ahead of me in words, Sylvia, but not in heart. Though, maybe, he's ahead of me even there. Do you know, Sylvia, I'm not sure that he's in love with Annabel? I believe he's just knuckled to the discovery that she's awfully taken with him. Doesn't he get away with it wonderfully? Thank heaven, I don't have to pretend! Oh, really, Sylvia, there's no mistake about my loving you! Can't — can't you say a little something in the way of encouragement? Sylvia? Before the bell rings? Just a little word?"

For answer she flashed upon him a look that any man in the world would have thought as good as a battle won, a great book written. And then the rush of the crowd back to their seats for the second half swept them along in its eddies.

"Oh, there!" Sherry complained as they toiled up the stairs, step by step, in the crush. "Back to the crowd again. But oh, that minute or two alone!"

For answer he felt a light pressure on his arm, the first, the only, token he had received from Sylvia of anything above a sort of armed neutrality.

And slight as it was, it re-made the world for a Sherry himself re-made. For the rest of the game, and the rest of its cheering, the lyrical totally supplanted the argumentative in his asides to her ear.

Was there any resisting even his honesty? Sylvia's eyes and Sylvia's cheeks thenceforward registered a steady negative.

"Of course you understand, Sylvia, dear," he was careful once to explain. "I'm not fooling you. I'm never going to be Senator, or Governor, as Penning is. But I'm going to be a much more important personage than that. I'm going to be the husband of Sylvia Banks — of Sylvia Brookes. That's wonderful enough for me, thank you!" . . .

By seven that evening the ladies had donned again their glittering regalia and joined the flagrantly exulting Sherry in the dining-room of the gay hotel, amid the cheers and shouting and laughter of the victorious partisans of Harvard. To their wearied nerves there must have come moments of wonder and of wishing when the excitement would at last subside to an endurable pitch.

For them it did come to a sudden termination when a boy in green uniform passed among the tables crying the name of "Mrs. J. Johnson Banks, please. Mrs. J. Johnson Banks."

And on Sherry's hailing him, he placed in Mrs. Banks's hand a telegram, which she read, and then said,

"Oh, dear! . . . What do you suppose is the matter!"

To Sherry there seemed something pleasantly significant in her handing it at once to him, and he read: —

“Come home at once.” That was all.

“It’s from the Senator, isn’t it?” he said vacantly. Then as he collected something of tact, he added, “He’s homesick, that’s all. Not ill, surely.”

“Oh, it’s something serious. See?” Mrs. Banks reached across and pointed to the yellow paper that engaged Sherry’s stare. “It’s serious. He’s signed it ‘Joshua.’”

Sherry leaned back in his chair, with his heart full of “damns,” and thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets. “I think we’d better go home a little sooner than we had planned, Mrs. Banks,” he decided. “But we needn’t exactly hurry. That is, you needn’t. And you needn’t worry. I think I know what it means. And I’ll proceed to see that it means nothing.”

The two ladies insisted, however, on leaving at once, and over the telephone Sherry was able to commandeer for them a lucky stateroom, and for himself a last upper, on the one o’clock train that same night for New York.

And at three the next afternoon they were met at the station in Rossacre by Senator Banks, breathless, pale, ill, broken, and a badly beaten man.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY arrived in Rossacre at three. At perhaps three-fifteen Sherry Brookes brushed past the doorman who guarded the private office at the rear of Landis & Co., whose banking house faced Court House Square, and strode into the Presence.

Standing over Landis as he sat at his desk, Sherry, following his own style in diplomacy, said quietly, "You rat! You've tried it on, have you? Well, to-morrow *The Globe* comes out with your story. It's all written."

By then the big doorman and half a dozen other employés of the bank, perhaps coached by their chief, had edged within the glass-enclosed private area. They stood at attention, merely, nevertheless, as Sherry seized the back of a heavy mahogany chair and swung round so that he had the crowd of them before him.

"Now then, hound!" he said, a little louder, that no word might be subject to equivocation. "I give you just two weeks longer in this town, to clear up your affairs. After that it won't be a safe place for you. Look at him!" he urged upon the faithful retainers. And they looked.

It was clear that they were present under orders, and not subject to the compulsion of loyalty. In his bank Landis was plainly the Landis known to the town.

"Looks like a dead man. Pale green! By Godfrey, there's nothing about you sweet enough to be called a stench!" he hurled down at the almost apoplectic man seated beside him. "One hesitates to crush you, on account of the nasty spot you'd make. But I'll tell you one thing more. This town belongs to three men still — Senator J. Johnson Banks, Andrew Penning, and myself. Now if you haven't the intelligence to get out of here in two weeks of your own accord, I've got the names of fifty men who are sworn to help me ride you out on a rail. And by heavens, I've a notion we'll first take you out in a dark corner of the woods and give you the spanking of your life. It's time you learned that a man can't pull off just anything he pleases in this world. And if you go to New York or Philadelphia, or Boston or Chicago, I'll follow you there. I know all the moneyed men in this country. You had fair enough warning before. Now I tell you you can't take a step, anywhere, unless I say so. Oh, don't put up your fists!" Sherry laughed. For Landis, his teeth clenched, his face white as chalk, had risen to his feet, a good deal impressed by the warning, and yet angry to the point of blindness, with a long steel paper-knife in his hands. Not a beautiful picture, with his small grey eyes, placed closely together, now closer than ever under his angry frown. "I can beat you more easily with my fists than I can with my head," Sherry was saying.

"McGuire!" Landis choked out, to his doorman.

The doorman duly stepped forward, in answer to the call of duty. He met a lightning blow on the jaw, and another at the pit of his stomach. And the next moment, to his vast surprise, and to the stupe-

faction of the bystanders, the great hulk was gasping for breath and writhing on the floor.

After gingerly stepping over him, Sherry turned to say, finally, to the equally astonished Landis, and the helpless crowd that surrounded him,

“You ’ve got a pair of ears, and you heard what I said.”

Then, glancing down over his attire, to see that it was still in perfect order, Sherry walked to the front door and out upon the street.

CHAPTER XIV

COPIES of a certain issue of *The Globe* still sell at a slight, a very slight, premium in Rossacre.

People of every degree there still remember the evening when they read Sherry's article of exposure. Some of them, the more civilised, rather deprecated Sherry's good taste, even doubted his good sense, in such a betrayal. The rest of Rossacre's citizenship applauded Sherry. On every ground except the moral, be it understood. A good many of the good people of Rossacre had approved of Walker Landis. Many of their hopes and aspirations he had effectively personified. A good many of them, possessing equal quantities of the "nerve" that Landis admired, would have behaved in the same manner. But they were willing to see even the admired Landis sacrificed, so long as it helped relieve the dullness of life.

The business reverses of Senator Banks were almost as refreshing. A good many Rossacrats deeply and truly sympathised with the Senator. Still, a more important thing was that life should be interesting, and it was mainly incidental what means befell the Senator to crowd aside the popular movie actor for the time.

If he had wished, the Senator might have scuttled and got out from under. As a last resort he might have let the road pass into the control of Landis and saved his own skin. But the Senator was not of that

kidney. Like any other good American business man, he had never made a dollar without borrowing another. Yet, not like all other good Americans, these borrowings constituted an obligation to him. The borrowing of near to half a million for improvements to the street railway, on the personal note of Banks as president, the Senator felt as a responsibility of his own. And when Walker Landis, in violation of a gentlemen's agreement, chose to retain possession of the physical assets of the company, tendered to him as a formal security for his name on the note, nothing was left to the Senator but to make good out of his own means the full sum that Landis had taken to himself. One after another of his business enterprises fell in the succession of sacrifices necessary to his satisfaction of his debt. His Scranton coal mine was involved. So was his West Virginia lumber tract, and half a dozen other important ventures. All were burdened with borrowings, and so, with the cornerstone withdrawn, the whole fabric of his fortune collapsed.

The directors of the street railway company were driven to accept his resignation as president. Half a dozen other promising enterprises went through the same formality. And in two weeks the Banks family were treating Rossacre to the sensation of their removal from their castellated house on the Avenue, with the fountain, and the lawn, and the marble statue of George Washington in classic robes and his arm in a sling, as if in immediate discharge from a hospital; and immediately the Senator was besieging his friends for a job as book-keeper or in any other serviceable capacity.

Naturally, promptly, Sherry Brookes stepped for-

ward there. Sylvia only refused the more stubbornly, as Sherry argued the more eagerly, to debase romance to the purposes of practical life-saving. For a time at least she preferred a personal service of her own. She burned to help her father back to fortune, and not simply to a home on another's generosity. Nothing could shake her determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with her father. And with instant enterprise she shocked the town and sought a job in a down-town millinery.

Two weeks later still the Rossacre *Clarion*, a starvelling sheet of no great import above a stalwart devotion to the principle of Prohibition, appeared with an obviously paid announcement to the effect that larger interests invited the removal of Walker P. Landis to New York, with the transfer of his now important banking business. But after Sherry's article of exposure, no one was deceived by this sugar coating which Landis put about his pill.

One man only in Rossacre looked upon the declension of Senator Banks with anything like a personal concern — and even he for reasons of self. The dramatic descent of the Senator served the purpose of overshadowing the decline of Judge Gayland.

Gayland's former grand airs had hurt so many jealousies and vanities, he had excited so many unhappy comparisons, in his campaign he had despitefully used so many good names, that Rossacre had preserved not simply a dry eye but a large measure of satisfaction at his own misfortunes.

In due time Gayland was re-elected to the Judgeship of L—— County, whatever little that predicated of his re-establishment in Rossacre esteem, social or moral. When, very late that Autumn, "the season"

really got into full swing many a dowager paused long at the name of Gayland on her list. The Wentworths and Wyeths did experiment daringly, in the instance of a general assembly at the Opera House. Over those two invitations the pride of Gayland had a struggle, and pride easily won the day. He refused to exhibit himself as he was then. In vain Mrs. Gayland pleaded and wept. She even took to her bed, ill at his refusal to accept this doubtful homage. Afterwards she made her call, punctually, as became her, and doubtless confided to Mrs. Wentworth and to Mrs. Wyeth all her thoughts upon God's evident displeasure with the Gayland family, plainly caused by the sudden callousness of her husband and her daughter toward the simplest demands of etiquette.

Indeed the whole trend of affairs in the Gayland household, it is a duty to report, was in a state of unfashionable melancholy. To the Judge life offered just next to nothing at all. The Judgeship was still his, of course, but long ago he had exhausted whatever there was of honour in the station. Now everybody knew that he consented to occupy it out of necessity. And he was removed from the world, out of harness, out of countenance, in being out of social sovereignty over Rossacre. The Judgeship had become a hollow thing now, a drag, rightfully named the Drudgeship, as it was by Annabel. Moreover the Judge's health had reached a pitch of indifference that it gave him trouble any longer to conceal. It is true that Mrs. Branstane did a second time offer him money — and a second time raged to see how it melted away in the settlement of election bills as before.

Mrs. Branstane had now all the old scores, and

many new ones, to see settled. For weeks Mrs. Branstane's claims upon the Judge had been set aside. All through this engrossing contest for the Judgeship she had chafed away in the background, a subordinate, a superfluity. With Ira's affairs in that state of suspense even self-interest on the part of Mrs. Branstane dictated that she should let him alone, — to strengthen himself for further habitual responses to her demands. Even Mrs. Gayland herself, in that stretch of political suspense, fended by the general stress of circumstance, luxuriated in almost complete immunity from the slings and arrows of outrageous Nellie.

Now that the Judgeship contest was favourably decided, Mrs. Gayland's immunity became even more complete. Nellie had worthier prey. Nellie scrupled longer to waste her energies on Mrs. Gayland. Nellie had a more important usurper to displace. Her old dominion over the Judge needed to be restored. Weeks of neglect, weeks of emancipation from her, called to be avenged. The dizzy height of superiority over the Gaylands which she had attained by shining against their mistakes and misfortunes and that she lost by relative unimportance beside their weighty life concerns — all that was to be regained. Annabel she might have spared, seeing what Annabel had wrought, or sought to accomplish, toward her social advancement. What, however, was the little that Annabel had wrought, beside the much more that Annabel should have wrought in all these years of neglect!

Everything in the world was translatable into an obligation to Mrs. Branstane.

And so Mrs. Branstane now moved about the Gay-

land house with a furtive eye and a velvet tread, as if the opportunity of her own advancement were some tangible thing, that might flee at her approach. And, in time, she duly arrived at just the opening she awaited to pounce upon.

By then the Judge had taken to wandering through the rooms of his mansion by himself, dreamily surveying its grandeur, once so admired and now so neglected and empty, fairly sick at this sense of its slipping away. Lovingly he would feel of a curtain, or stroke the polished surface of a table. They seemed to belong to a dimly remembered past. Sometimes he would catch a glimpse of Annabel, in a far corner of the house; and, if the light were just right, he might mark on her face a look quite different from that she always had ready when she knew, or suspected, that he was near. And he would stand so, in the distance, unobserved, and watch the girl, till the vision of her swam away in a sudden mist in his eyes; and then he would hurry away to the privacy of his own room.

On one of these excursions of appreciation through his house the Judge once encountered Mrs. Branstane. It was in the afternoon. Annabel and her mother were out on some errand or call, and Mrs. Branstane was alone in the library, ostensibly to dust, but really to intercept the Judge, of purpose, as he returned at the end of his day of work, his top-coat still upon him and his hat in his hand. There was something significant in their meeting thus, the Judge garbed as he was, like a visitor, and Mrs. Branstane so perfectly and comfortably at home.

"Oh-er-Nellie!" the Judge stammered, feeling, if not taking definite notice of, these facts in his situa-

tion. And by way of making it seem the more natural, to himself at least, he finished, "Could — could you let me have a shade more money — a thousand or two, this week? I'll give you, as security —"

"Well?" Mrs. Branstane smiled, in full enjoyment of his embarrassment and indecision. "Just what will you give me? What *will* you give me? What have you got left to give?"

For answer the Judge could only turn away in hope of escape.

But Mrs. Branstane stayed him. "You poor pauper! You miserable fool!" she hurled at him boldly.

The leash upon her long-pent, long-starved rage, was slipping, and she was fairly raging with it. Venomous. Combat she had always lived for. But now the Judge's battered sensitiveness longed only to fly from this mailed brutality. He only stood and smiled at her, sheepishly.

"Well!" Mrs. Branstane granted herself the pleasure of comment on the abjectness of his surrender. "I guess this is the end of everything. Isn't it? . . . Nothing more for you, eh? . . . This is where we land at last, you see. After all that's been. Fine, isn't it! . . . But wasn't it grand while it lasted! My work, and your glory, too, that's what it was. Do you ever seriously think you made your own success in life, such as it was? Do you ever really think you furnished the brains that made it? H'm! What I didn't give you, you got by luck! You've got the Judgeship again, but ho-ow did you get it? By your own deserts? H'm! It's been handed to you, by a real man. A man so big that he didn't

want to bother with it, and flung it in your face. Ho-ow did you ever get all your money in the first place? Why-y, it was flung in your face, given to you by your friends, that 's how! You simply laid on the airs good and thick, and puffed out your chest, and pretended to know everything; and the poor ignorant fools here took you for a man of brains and laid their money at your feet. For showing them how to dance and take their soup nicely. That 's how."

Mrs. Branstane allowed herself a moment to laugh.

"Now they 've found you out," she drove on at him again. "And the whole town hates you for having fooled it so long. The whole town knows you and hates you. The wonder is that you could fool it as long as you did. But that — was because of me. You understand? Because of me. Me, me, me! I built you up. Who else was there to do it? I did it, I tell you. I, I, I! Ugh! . . . And what did I get out of it in all these years — except kicks and cuffs and a place in the back of the house! To think of it! Why did I do it! Why — did — I — do it!"

There the thwarted ambition, the baffled cupidity, her consciousness of her years, too many of them wasted in pursuit of this disappointing quarry — *all* the springs that went to move the engine that was Mrs. Branstane whirled off into loud laughter.

In reply there was nothing for the Judge to say.

Long this woman had pretended to have suffered on his account, in having loved him, and worked for love of him. Truly, in some crude fashion, she had helped him, as she boasted. Still, would claims so extravagant as hers upon his gratitude have obtained anywhere except at the court of his rather easy generosity?

Puzzled, silent, worn, the Judge fumbled his hat as he faced the woman and looked dreamily, vacantly, into her face, into this strange and unaccountable and seething intelligence, that had enveloped him, like a disease, and had fettered and broken and throttled him, and brought him to the pass where he was. Wearily he smiled at their differing views of his life.

But he said nothing. It was too late.

"Oh, you've simply got your deserts, that's all!" the tongue was running on. "You could buy yourself a grand time while the money lasted — the gift money, the luck money. Now the money's all gone, isn't it? And a man's nonsense always comes back on him in time. You never thought of me in all these years — except when you needed brains for your dinner cards, and — and everything else. You never thought of anybody but yourself, and your grand airs — and your elegant daughter and your wife, and *their* grand airs. At my expense. You never thought of the pain and hunger that *I* was going through. You never thought of the wrong you had done. Of the years you had taken out of my life."

By then Mrs. Branstane had dropped the Judge, as a subject irrelevant and immaterial. Naturally, logically, inevitably she had drifted to the more fascinating topic of herself, her "wrongs," and her ceaseless and unrequited endeavours "for years" in his behalf.

Mrs. Branstane finished the afternoon pleased with herself. She felt herself improving. Never had she talked so well. . . .

All "these years" Mrs. Branstane had been stab-

bing Judge Gayland with daily convictions of his worthlessness. This was the last stab. From that last afternoon Judge Gayland never recovered.

Still Annabel would hand him his hat, or hold for him his coat, those early December mornings as he set out to his work — and would hide from him the worn velvet of his collar.

“Wouldn’t it be fine if *I* could do your Judging for you!” she would say. Or, “I wish, Daddy, that I could be tired in your place.” Or sometimes, when the sun was especially bright and the air crisp, she was able to accomplish real gaiety, for his benefit, and say,

“Now, Daddy, not *too* much work to-day, remember. Too much suicide will kill any man.”

Often, for all these happy sallies on the part of Annabel, and sometimes because of them, first Annabel’s father, and then the Judge’s daughter, would think of some forgotten but wanted article in a room above stairs — and would return no more that evening.

January arrived. And with it the ceremony of swearing in Ira Gayland for another term as Judge of the Common Pleas Court, of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, and of the Orphans’ Court, of the district represented by L—— County.

For the first three weeks of his new term Judge Gayland held well to his work, even renewed by it. Then he took to his bed, too weary, he was brought to admit, for a foot to be stirred, a pen applied to paper. The next week, under the eye of good Dr. Richter, his malady was seen to be a progressive nervous and mental depletion, and his days on the bench, and perhaps in life, were numbered.

When they told the truth to Annabel, as she demanded, she walked to her room and they saw nothing of her for two days.

So the giddy years of her girlhood were gone, the frivolous years that represented a total blank of costly and idle pleasures, of dresses only, and drives and travels and indulgences generally. The new years that she had visioned too late, of devotion and cheer, were not to be kissed into being. This wondrous new continent of Friendship she had lately discovered, like a second Columbus, whose cool groves of sympathy, whose meadows of solace and succour she had planned to roam with him, — this continent had turned out to be after all but a narrow little island. And Annabel was left standing upon its farthest coast, looking off over the lonely puzzle of existence.

CHAPTER XV

THEY did for the stricken Judge what it was possible to do. It says much that the night nurse, happening to leave the sick-room one morning at five, found Annabel crouched against the door, and asleep, where she had crouched, sleeplessly before, the night through.

Even Mrs. Branstane thawed and relented, and thought of and paid for some of the costlier needs and relaxations that it did not occur to the physician or the family to provide. Twice she hired a motor to give him an airing. And in the house she hovered about, and thought of minor ministrations she might perform, and even spoke the cheering word.

She would have done better to have kept from view.

When she came to his chamber the Judge followed her about with a burning eye. In her presence he shrivelled, or else was aroused to a fever of resistance. She seemed to him a malignant shape, the personification of his ruin, the embodiment of all the worrying potentialities that she had shaken over his head all "these years," until now he was like to die for dread of them. He remembered, too, in the still hours of his vain hopes of health, Mrs. Branstane's hint that his very death need not end the payment of his great mystic debt to her. And so all that was dear to him, some of it inexpressibly dear, his sick imagination was leaving undefended to the powers in this woman.

Penning did call, not once but early and many times, could the Judge have known. The first time met at the door by Miss Annabel herself. And they had retired together to a quiet spot in the house.

"I — I've left you alone," he began.

"Yes, but think how childish I've been!" she answered. . . .

As for Mrs. Branstane, Mrs. Branstane now condescended with entire cheerfulness. Already she was living in the future, and endured all her present distresses and tasks with patience, and roamed about the great house with a constant smile, and with nothing now to dispute her notion of proprietorship.

"Well, Ira!" she once said to the Judge, in one of his remaining moments of good sense. "It's hard to say 'Good-bye,' isn't it! But I doubt if you'll ever be fully yourself again. So they tell me. Of course it's too bad that you have to tail off like this. Let me see. You're only fifty, aren't you? — and might have lived and worked on. But then, you know how you have lived in your time!"

"What the devil are you saying!"

The interruption had come from Penning, who happened to come at that moment to the sick-room to inquire.

For answer Mrs. Branstane turned from the foot of the bed where she stood and blazed at the man who stood in the door.

Straight up to her Penning stepped and, looking all his aversion, said, "Leave the room."

And Mrs. Branstane left it.

However, the Judge had been spared her final infliction, having sunk into one of the blank periods that were characteristic of his distemper.

Even Annabel, who was following Penning, looked from her father to Mrs. Branstane and to Penning himself, with a vision dulled by thought of other things.

She waited absently till Mrs. Branstane had passed through the door. Then suddenly she waved the nurse, and Penning, and even the doctor, out of the room. . . .

By some merciful arrangement of Nature our minds are commonly staggered by crises. Mercifully the realisation comes only bit by bit.

Till they had closed the door behind them Annabel waited. Then she sank to her knees beside her father's bed, and threw her arms across it.

"Father — father!" she cried.

But though she stroked his hands, and though the Judge's eyes were open and vacantly roved, he never heard.

"Father, come back to me — please!" . . .

Outside the chamber door the doctor, standing in readiness, caught the light noise of her body slipping limply to the floor.

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER I

FOR some time the Hon. Andrew Penning had felt a very considerable astonishment at the procession of events past him. He now felt even more astonishment as he himself became a parader in them.

And while the Honourable Andrew enjoyed the assistance of a very striking set of circumstances, the truth remains that during his brief term as President Judge of the Common Pleas Court of L—— County he made a thundering ass of himself.

On the retirement of Judge Gayland it became the Governor's duty, in pursuance of procedure fixed by law, to appoint a successor to fill the vacancy until, at the next regular election, the choice of the district should fall upon some other to occupy the post for the full term of ten years.

What more fitting figure for this temporary inconvenience, thought the Governor, and Rossacre, and all L—— County, than the favourably known Andrew Penning? Surely the Hon. Andrew, foresighted as he might be, might content himself with the Judgeship of L—— County for so little as a year or less? Surely the Hon. Andrew might feel in some trifling fashion flattered by a temporary Judgeship?

Fate, it appeared, meant never to have done with Andrew Penning.

And though Penning's income was halved in the

doing, he did consent to humour Fate and satisfy the eternal proprieties and Rossacre and Senator Banks, who engineered the appointment, by graciously consenting to be Judge of L—— County for the greater part of a year.

With due social and legal formalities Rossacre and the County saw him installed in office. The County Bar Association tendered him a blazing reception at the Lincoln Club. Brilliant jurists and legal lights from far away came to felicitate him. The elect of Rossacre, and a large part of Rossacre not so elect, wore flaming gowns in his honour, and uncovered camphor-smelling evening garments, that Judge Penning might, as ran the stereotyped phrase of the press, be suitably inducted into office.

So, duly made Judge, Penning buckled down to the stern task of bringing order out of the chaos of judicial affairs bequeathed him by the harried man whose shoes he filled.

With his professional conscience now stirred to an exemplary performance of his new duties, Judge Penning laboured early and toiled late. Such a thing as a clock he forgot completely, and Rossacre drawing-rooms, to the regret of their political wisdom, saw him not. The simple greetings which he bestowed upon acquaintances in the street were almost the one bubble of sociability that he chose to send up out of the morass of work in which he found himself.

One relaxation only did the young Judge permit himself — the evenings that he passed in the company of Miss Gayland, in the splendid mansion up The Avenue. There a now well-practised minister to judicial fatigues was rapidly becoming adept in the transfer of her cheering influences from the former

and absent president of her world, to an equally willing and weary vice-president who came for restoration.

He also accomplished some little in the way of good comradeship himself, in return. It struck him as wonderful, Annabel's bravery and spirit in her trying situation. To Penning it had never occurred before how much she was bearing alone. Courageously she bore the shock of learning the true and unhappy state of her father's affairs. With a stout heart and a level head she waited the laggard legal adjustment of them for the behoof of his unhappy family. Yet through all this business Annabel contrived an eager curiosity toward Penning's own affairs.

It seemed to him, one night very late as he thought of this before the fire in his rooms, that she had been cheering him at his work a long time before he had noticed it. Looking back, he was amazed to measure the extent of his reliance upon her spirits — through the infinite irritations of his work, the impact of appeals for small offices within his appointment, the appeal of the more stupid young lawyers who besought his counsel in their first affairs, the deputations of uplifters and enthusiasts and downright cranks from the ranks of the Woman's Civic Club, who forever drafted his sympathy and support in one or other of their schemes of petty reform.

They wanted more artistic bridges over the rambling streams of the County. They demanded fewer saloons in a given district. They presented bills of particulars against the character of various County officers. They were, in a word, like all their kind all over our dear country, a colossal and compendious nuisance. They clogged the wheels of Justice, they ditched the car of Progress.

One morning early in February of the following year the current of the County's legal business was halted by the good ladies of the W. C. T. U., who, though bent upon quite other concerns, unwittingly started Judge Penning's affairs on the way to that striking upheaval which marked this period in Ross-acre history.

The ladies rustled into Court's Chambers with much display of silk, fur, feathers, and civic righteousness. Their errand was to "bring every pressure to bear" upon the young Judge to restrict the number of licenses to be granted that Spring. So only, they brought every feminine form of argument to bear, could the bliss of mankind be properly conserved.

Graciously Judge Penning heard them through, and disappointed their high hopes of him with a refusal to do more than take the matter under advisement. It was not until the good women had gone, with murmurs of their solemn dissatisfaction, that they became, without their own knowledge, the instruments of Destiny. As if on an after-thought, one of the ladies had remained, and begged one moment more of his time. In her neatly gloved hand she carried a folded paper which she held out to him with a smile and the apology,

"May I have a word more, Mr. Penning?"

"Oh! Good morning, Mrs — ah — Mrs. Branstane." Penning turned about again at his desk, where he was ostentatiously preparing to begin his work afresh. In his surprise at her lingering he had almost forgotten the lady's name. And her errand surprised him even more.

"A bill?" he said, opening the paper which she extended, as if it were a dangerous explosive. He

looked up again at Mrs. Branstane in a moment, after having glanced over it hastily.

"It's Fink's bill, yes," she answered. "The — the Gaylands' grocer, you know."

"Well?"

"He — he wants his money."

"Has he dunned the family?"

"He's worried Mrs. Gayland almost sick."

"The fool! Didn't you tell him he'd be paid when we get the trustees to work on Judge Gayland's affairs?"

"I told him, yes. But he thinks I am only trying to dodge him. He's been threatening to sue."

"Sue? The idea!"

"And he's threatened to see Mrs. Gayland herself. You know she's in no shape to attend to such matters. And so —"

"Yes, yes?"

"I've had quite a time to keep the matter from them — from them both." As if in embarrassment Mrs. Branstane laughed her low laugh. "It has worried me no end. I hated to trouble you, but I thought I'd see you about it. Maybe you could bring Fink to his senses."

"Yes — yes." Penning studied the bill more carefully. It had, indeed, been running a long time. "Quite right, Mrs. — Mrs. Branstane," he said, still poring over the bill, but aware that some acknowledgement of his visitor's presence was due. "I'll see Fink about this myself," he said, with finality, folding the bill and stowing it in an inside pocket. "Meanwhile it's thoughtful of you to have come to me. I'm sure Mrs. Gayland and Miss Gayland will appreciate that. I shall tell them, in good time."

"Oh, why tell them, and worry them, at *any* time? At least until the bill is paid. They have enough to worry them as it is." And again Mrs. Branstane laughed her quiet laugh, as if in embarrassment.

"Quite right. A good idea."

Without being aware of it, Penning had spoken to the woman with more deference, and in a tone of more respect, than he had ever employed toward her before. He was impressed. Even her physical presence he regarded more attentively than had been his custom. Precisely as Mrs. Branstane had hoped and planned, and even rehearsed before her mirror, Penning was touched with her flattering reference to him of this matter of intimate difficulty and practical sentiment.

"And if anything else of the kind comes up, Mrs. Branstane," he continued kindly, and now recalling her name without difficulty, "don't hesitate to bring it straight to me."

Highly gratified, Mrs. Branstane took her departure.

Over the frail bridge, the lucky device, of a grocer's bill she had edged closer to Mr. Penning than she had ever crowded before. And in four days more she had arrayed herself in her most fetching toilette for another consultation with Mr. Penning. Hadn't he counselled it?

This time again it was a bill, a long-standing account for dress materials against the Gayland ladies on the part of another merchant who had grown impatient.

As Penning took this matter also into his own care, Mrs. Branstane thought of something further.

"Would you mind, Mr. Penning — Judge Penning, pardon me — recommending me to some new provis-

ion house, that will be willing to give credit for a while, until affairs can be straightened out?"

That also Penning promised his immediate attention.

Other visitors presented themselves in Court's Chambers while Mrs. Branstane was there. Possibly some of them noticed that she sought to linger a minute or two, unobtrusively.

Not certain as to how she might accomplish it, Mrs. Branstane hoped for an occasion to say something further, that might put her relationship with Judge Penning, slight as it was, on a footing of its own, firmer, and apart from the financial trials of the Gaylands. She wanted to be taken for a personage in herself, and not always as a humble emissary from the Gayland mansion.

But at length, seeing that in the press of more imposing claims upon the Judge's time, her existence had been once again forgotten, Mrs. Branstane withdrew.

The next one of her calls upon Judge Penning, however, that dignitary never forgot so long as he lived.

CHAPTER II

THE L—— County Court House, a brick building of uncertain war-time architecture and of no very great distinction, placed in a small tree-shaded square, gives up almost the whole of its second floor to the court-room proper. In the rear of this larger room are quarters for juries, a smaller court-room for minor and juvenile cases, a library of law books, and retiring-rooms for the Judge and for pleaders at the bar.

The ground floor of the building, cloven from end to end by a tiled corridor, is honeycombed with offices leading off from this divisive hall, each office fronted with a frosted glass door, each door bearing appropriate sign of its function and occupancy. Rooms are allotted to the Prothonotary, to the Orphans Court, to the Court of Oyer and Terminer, to the County Commissioners, the County Treasurer and the Sheriff.

A last door, opening from the hall about midway along its length, lettered "Court's Chambers," admitted the duly accredited visitor to a rich red rug laid within four high walls solidly lined with law books. On one side the wall of books is punctured by the door of admittance. On the opposite side of the room two tall and wide windows look out upon the elm-dotted square, with the street beyond. At one end the books are parted about a marble fireplace, and at the other end about the door to the

vaulted filing-room adjoining. The room is finished in walnut, and littered with a thicket of chairs and small tables in the same sombre wood. Out of this jungle of furniture rise two painted iron columns, of Corinthian persuasion, to support a portion of the general court-room above.

In this work-room sat Judge Penning one morning about the middle of February, seated behind a broad and flat walnut desk stationed beside one of the tall windows, busily scratching away at a court opinion. The day was a masterpiece of the dismal, a triumph of what the hysterical season of the year can accomplish with the atmospheric possibilities of the valley about Rossacre. Such weather must make many murderers, and other work for the Courts.

In lieu of air a thick fog filled the square, with a thin and fine and chill rain sifting through it mournfully. From time to time the naked trees shivered at some slight stir of air, as if shuddering at the icy drops of water that trickled down their glistening black twigs and branches. In the street beyond the square the deserted sidewalks tinkled with raindrops — the myriad pattering feet of the fog. And for once — for the first time Penning could remember since his assumption of the Judgeship — Court's Chambers so far that morning had been crowded with nothing but the thoughts of its official tenant. He was alone, he was busy, he was happy.

Across and across the pages of legal cap flew his pen. The rapid working of his mind brought a flood of red blood to his cheek. At one moment he would rush to one of the shelves and reach down some volume of reports, some work of an authority; or sometimes he rose and stood by the window, waiting

for a phrase to shape itself just to his liking; or leaning back in his swivel chair between paragraphs he would call out and chaff decrepit old Sebastian Drumgoogle, court crier and Judge's factotum.

Eleven struck on the musically toned bell in the tower above the building, and chimed from the clock on the mantel; and still the toiler wrote on, as if his energy ignored all limits and as if clocks were outlawed from his world. Noiselessly old Drumgoogle moved about with his duster, and drew from the toiling Judge as little attention as either of the Corinthian columns. A lone, lorn, surviving, and still enterprising fly buzzed against the pane. The faint drip of the rain outside played a soft accompaniment to the scratch of the judicial pen. Nothing but the silence of a winter night in the country could match this stillness — so complete that the knock on the door, which then broke the period, might have been, from the shock it disseminated, the report of a cannon. The very chairs danced, and the windows rattled, at the sound.

Without looking up from his work, Penning signalled to Drumgoogle to admit the intruder, whoever he was, whose business would not wait even upon such discouraging weather. Still one more sentence called for a finishing touch, and for a minute longer the Judge wrote on.

When he did consent to look up, it was in astonishment at the rustle of skirts.

Need it be said that the skirts draped the comely person of Mrs. Branstane?

She noisily stamped into the room in a long grey rain-coat donned against this masterpiece of February weather, with tappings of her feet and her um-

rella, in a general willingness to free her garments of their dampness.

Passing the glass door of a bookcase, Mrs. Branstane obeyed a feminine impulse to survey herself in the uncertain mirror which it formed against the books behind it.

Instantly he saw who it was, there faded from Penning's face all trace of the instinctive and friendly courtesy which the prospect of an interested visitor sometimes brought him.

For all the twelve or more years that he had seen Mrs. Branstane casually — he had never stopped to calculate them — Penning had always felt an ungovernable, an unexplainable antipathy toward this person. Of late days the feeling — or was it an instinct? — had grown upon him, as he marked how Mrs. Branstane became less the housekeeper than the petted and spoiled companion of the Gayland ladies. Always, now, Mrs. Branstrane seemed to be forcing him to resent some subtle familiarity. And he took it upon him to resent even the familiarities that the Gayland ladies themselves seemed ready to indulge in the woman.

"Busy, Judge?" she asked.

And he resented even the touch of familiarity suggested in the brevity of her greeting. At the very sound of her voice Penning was an instant pillar of starch.

"Not so busy, madam, but I can attend to any business you may have with me." And for all his blandness he could not prevent the word "business" from taking on a slight emphasis.

There seemed to him, too, a touch of irony in the somewhat noticeable sweetness of Mrs. Branstrane's drawl of "Busy, Judge?"

The irony was certainly there. High time, Mrs. Branstane had decided, that this fine gentleman should be set right about her. She smiled to see him hoist before her his eternal guard of suavity. She was glad for it. He was providing her with her needed stimulant of irritation. The anger she had carefully licked up in herself in setting out to see him, and the inspiration that anger always gave her, were not, then, to ooze away in any soft and defeating mush of understanding and good-fellowship. In anger Mrs. Branstane was always in her element and on familiar ground.

She spoke in the drawl that always resulted whenever she wished to be disagreeable, and felt it safe to be so.

"Well, now, if you really are at leisure, I do have something I'd like very much to see you about — to have your opinion."

The tone, and her peculiar smile, drew a sharp glance of inquiry from Penning. "Yes — yes," he said. "Well, madam, let us come to it at once, if you don't mind?"

Suave he was, though the suavity came hard.

For answer Mrs. Branstane looked dubiously, loftily, at Drumgoogle.

"You may speak before him in perfect assurance, Mrs. — ah — Mrs. Branstane."

"But I should rawther — ?"

"Mr. Drumgoogle, in the next room, if you please."

Waiting for the rheumatic old fellow to close the door to the vaulted room, Mrs. Branstane permitted herself to gravitate languidly into the nearest chair bearing arms. Her opened newmarket fell apart, and disclosed a bit of ankle as she crossed one leg

over the other with a neatly shod foot swaying placidly. On observing a fleck of partly dried mud upon her shoe, she coolly and leisurely leaned forward and flicked it off with a corner of her coat. Then, languidly again, her back sought the back of the chair, her arms found its arms, one hand slowly waving the handle of her umbrella, pivoted on the floor, and the one swinging foot now curtaining and now exposing the other well-turned ankle.

Plainly Mrs. Branstane considered herself already proficient in the accepted Rossacre drawing-room manner.

Judge Penning came round from behind his desk, with the offering, "Now, Mrs. Branstane, what is it, please?"

Wearily he hoisted the tail of his coat, folded his arms, and half sat, half leaned, upon his desk, in a slight excess of polite expectancy, to imply that the interview was to be brief. "What the devil can she want now!" he groaned to himself. This was the third time she had intruded with her trivial "business."

For a moment Mrs. Branstane simply sat and smiled.

Not a bad figure did she cut, either, with her smoothly rounded throat and shoulders, undisguised by the cut of her garment, with her light bronze-coloured hair, with her plump curves and the vigour and strength of her movements.

But Mrs. Branstane's face also had the foundation of a jaw, when you observed it. She never opened her lips widely when she talked, and there was that in her dark-brown eye, in the strong and even tone of her voice — something written all over her — which men never behold in a woman without sensations of panic.

At that moment Mrs. Branstane's eyes were two carbuncles, set in a nagging smile.

"Yes, Mr. Penning — I beg your pardon, Judge Penning," she drawled. "Yes, let us come to business at once. Probably you know what it is?"

Evidently Mrs. Branstane wished to point her "business" with humour.

Penning undertook to annihilate this turn toward wit. He was all frost, all dignity, all Penning.

"Your business, madam? I don't believe I can grasp it in advance." He even lost control of his patience and added, "It seems to be a trifle recondite." Then, seeing that he had committed himself, he said on, "I really must ask you to be prompt and definite — and brief. I'm overwhelmed with work this morning."

Mrs. Branstane continued to smile.

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Penning — Judge Penning, pardon me! Yes, yes; let us lose no time. Let's go straight to business, certainly. This time I shan't annoy you with matters of sugar and tea, Mr. Penning. This time it is something rather different," she loftily drawled. "Excuse me, Mr. Penning, but you were, I suppose, one of the intimates of Judge Gayland, were you not?"

Light was breaking over Penning. And to save time with the exasperating woman, he made straight for the point of what she appeared to be struggling to say. "Something about the Judge's personal affairs this time? What is it, please?"

The Judge even lighted up, and leaned forward ever so little, in a reviving interest.

"Yes. Certainly, Mr. Penning, certainly. Yes. It is about Judge Gayland." Mrs. Branstane laughed

her quiet laugh. "I could bring it only to you, of course — you being — well, the first of his friends, I may say? You were really the Judge's most intimate friend, I presume?"

"Well, well, madam!" Penning leaned back, to mark the extent of his patience. "Judge Gayland was one of my most honoured friends, perhaps. I don't say I was his most intimate friend. I couldn't go so far. Have you some doubt about my trustworthiness?"

"Oh, my dear Mr. Penning — Judge Penning! I'm perfectly sure of you!"

This was certain to have happened, in time, this repayment on the part of Mrs. Branstane for all the deposits of wrath he had been planting in her retentive memory in all "these years." The repayment was only coming due.

Mrs. Branstane continued with her knowing smile. Her campaign of irritation was going admirably. She knew perfectly well that she was interrupting his work, that he was nettled by her sheer physical presence, nettled by her impudence, and by the advantage she was taking of his courtesy. And she was smiling at her success with this new strong man.

She was in the humour against which a fine nature would dash itself like a bottle against a wall.

Hence she started on again, with her "rawthers," until Penning once more tried to cut to the core of the fine lady's delighted chatter.

"Really, really!" he said. "You mean, do you, that you've discovered some serious, some unexpected financial shortage? Is that it?"

"Why, exactly, Mr. Penning, exactly! A shortage indeed — that has run on for a long time. For some

time, yes — something that has given me a great deal of trouble to conceal from the family.”

At the grim truth in her statement Mrs. Branstane laughed lightly again. And at Penning’s instant response now to any touch she chose to lay on, she laughed further; he was so quickly, so deeply perturbed at her news.

“That is to say, Judge Penning,” Mrs. Branstane went on loftily, “I have sought you again — for your help — from your superior knowledge of Judge Gayland’s affairs.”

“Yes — yes. Explain, if you please.”

“Certainly! Things have come to such a pass that for upwards of two weeks now, I should say, I have been running that household — that whole house, mind you — on my own money. On my own savings.”

Naturally, at that, Judge Penning’s eyes went wide open.

“Why, why!” he stammered. “Can it be possible!” He studied the floor, and rubbed it with his foot, for a moment. “You — you say this discrepancy has been running on for some time? I can’t understand it. I never knew — In short, this is astounding. I thought Judge Gayland was a very rich man. Of course I have no intimate knowledge of the state of his affairs. But not long ago Mrs. Gayland herself assured me —”

“Mrs. Gayland herself has been blind to it all along. And so has Annabel.”

Penning frowned at the studied omission of the “Miss.”

“I must say,” Mrs. Branstane was blandly running on, “they have both been — well, extravagant.

Needlessly extravagant. All their lives. And do what I could, I could never make them see that it was dangerous and wrong."

Again Mrs. Branstane laughed lightly.

"Even now," she ran on, "Mrs. Gayland won't see it. She insists that things *must* be all right. I can't convince her that —"

"But hadn't Judge Gayland ample funds in the bank? Haven't his holdings realised a generous income?"

"They haven't realised anything." Deliberately Mrs. Branstane chose to misapply the word. "Crazed as they are with grief and worry, how can they realise where they stand!"

"Yes — yes. I suppose —"

"They've left everything to me. And I myself have more knowledge than I care for about Judge Gayland's affairs! It's an enormous expense, so it is — running that great house. Something *I* can't be expected to bear for ever — on my own savings. You can see for yourself how absurd it is."

"Yes — yes." Penning was smiling at the niggardly spirit in the woman.

But Mrs. Branstane too was smiling. Just the impressions that she meant him to gather, Penning duly gathered. "Great heavens!" she was making him think. "What selfishness! So that's her 'business'! For years she has been in the employ of the Gaylands' — at a good round wage, I don't doubt. Yet merely while their affairs are being adjusted she begrudges them the loan of a little financial help! Her precious savings!"

After a moment of shrewd and formidable study of her, as he thought, Penning said to her sharply,

"Mrs. Branstane, never fear for your money. If it is necessary I shall repay you that myself. Meanwhile, if you want me to speak to the family, if you want me to open their eyes to this — this flagrant abuse of your generosity —"

"Oh, nothing of the kind, Mr. Penning, nothing of the kind!" Mrs. Branstane laughed softly, indulgently. "I see you fancy that I grudge the Gaylands this little help in time of need. But that's nothing. The point is, this need is likely to continue — I may say indefinitely. That's what I'm thinking of. That is why I am here this morning — to learn from you what is best to be done. You as an authority on Judge Gayland's affairs. I've put off the visit long enough as it is. That house is an enormous expense, as I have said."

There Mrs. Branstane paused, in order to launch with the fullest effect the last of her bolts.

"It strikes me, Mr. Penning," she said slowly and incisively, "it strikes me that three thousand dollars was a rather small sum for Judge Gayland to leave in the bank. Rather a small amount for Judge Gayland, don't you think?"

"Three thousand —"

"Yet it was all the money Mrs. Gayland could count upon. Of course something could be realised by the sale of the remaining property — the house, and so on. But I thought that you, perhaps, with your greater familiarity with Judge Gayland's affairs, might know — ?"

"Three thousand dollars, only!" Penning repeated. "Absurd. Why, I've heard that Judge Gayland carried a cash deposit of easily \$25,000 up to the day of his illness. What of that? Only a fortnight

ago Mrs. Gayland assured me that she could be comfortable on the cash that was readily available."

"Indeed, Mr. Penning!" Mrs. Branstane burst in.

The conversation was displaying an irritating tendency to fasten itself to facts; and Mrs. Branstane was there to exercise her emotions.

"Indeed, Mr. Penning!" she said. "Well, I can tell you this much, that Mrs. Gayland would not be up there in that house, crying her eyes out, if that much cold cash had come into her possession! And to my positive knowledge Judge Gayland was obliged to scale down his style of life, and even to borrow money, a whole year before his illness. Three thousand dollars was all *I* knew he had. And I'm rather surprised that he had that much. The money he did leave was eat up fast enough in paying his worst election debts. What else he had, I fancy, went to smash, along with everything else, in the — well," she finished in a tone of light sarcasm, "in the general slump. But I thought of course that *you* —"

Mrs. Branstane ended with the cunning appearance of having blurted more than she meant to divulge. She loved this play with allusion and inference. And here, in Penning, she found just the organ to play upon.

"Yes — yes." Dutifully Penning caught all Mrs. Branstane's allusions and subtleties.

And Mrs. Branstane only laughed outright as he drilled her with his gaze.

"You yourself seem, Mrs. — ah — Mrs. Branstane," Penning began speaking in the rasping staccato of the cross-examiner, "you yourself seem to have a surprising knowledge of Judge Gayland's affairs." All his ancient instinctive suspicion of Mrs. Branstane

was alert in him again. "In fact," he proceeded, "you seem to know more about his personal affairs than I do — or even Mrs. Gayland herself."

Now at last Penning thought he had penetrated this meddling fool, and the lawyer in him proposed to have it out with her. He remembered Gayland's unaccountable latter-day poverty — with nothing much to show as having himself run altogether through his considerable fortune. Now the naïve disclosures — disclosures more of herself than of Gayland — crowded in upon Penning. He groped for the connection. Who had the money?

"You have been entrusted with the management of Judge Gayland's household for some little time, Mrs. — Mrs. Branstane?" he said. "As long as I have been privileged to visit the house, at least, I have seen you there. You must have served them —"

That word "service" again! "I 'served' them twelve years, if that is what you mean! And in all that time —"

"Yes — yes. You concerned yourself wholly with the management of the household affairs, I take it?"

"Mrs. Gayland —"

"Did you?"

"Mrs. Gayland —"

"I said, did you concern yourself solely with Judge Gayland's household affairs?"

All this Mrs. Branstane relished as the breath of life. She liked, she wanted, she required, to be stung to fury. Only then was she potent and truly herself.

"Mrs. Gayland was not content merely to have me run the house!" Mrs. Branstane shot out the words in a volley, in order to get them spoken before the possibility of interruption. "You know yourself

what a showy charity business she drove. You know how many clubs and societies she tried to boss. Well, sir, she saddled every bit of that onto me. She wasn't capable of it herself. Housekeeper? I was that woman's secretary, her office-boy — *everything*. Oh, I tell you I earned what little they stinted on me!"

"Ye-es. I didn't ask you what you were to Mrs. Gayland. But since you've brought up Mrs. Gayland, I'd like to know how it is — the thing that I can't penetrate in this 'business' of yours, Mrs. Branstane — is how Mrs. Gayland, whom you seem to have taken in — ah — who seems to have committed so many matters to you, should be ignorant of such of Judge Gayland's affairs as you appear to have known, intimately, for a long time. How did you know what Mrs. Gayland never knew at all?"

Poor Penning felt some little satisfaction at having thus traced Mrs. Branstane through the thicket of her own wiles — at having caught her thus, in the very ruck of them. Of her own accord the fool had put herself into his hands. Now to intimidate the blundering, self-condemned knave, and make short shrift of her!

"Judge Gayland I knew to be a man of very generous character, Mrs. Johnson — Mrs. Branstane. Everybody knew him to be such. He was generous, and perhaps too easy-going. Now, I trust you will pardon me, madam; but tell me if Judge Gayland himself was aware of your knowledge of his private affairs?"

Even as he said that Penning regretted his rash words. To insult the woman was far from his desire, but his inveterate suspicions had uttered themselves in spite of him.

In any event his regret came too late. Mrs. Bran-

stane was there purposely to feed her lust of combat, and Penning was simply serving her in the capacity of the most convenient antagonist.

Mrs. Branstane rose to her feet. Now at last the real play was begun.

"You poor fool! Poor idiot!" she snapped. "This is just the sort of thing I might expect from your past elegant treatment of me! You're no gentleman, for all your grand airs and your fine reputation. You ain't clever — for all you think you are. I come here and tell you that something has gone wrong in the Gayland house, and without waiting to find out the truth, you are ready to have me arrested. You think I've been stealing, do you? Smart lawyer you are, to insult you're own best witness! But I'll be obliging, anyway. I'll tell you all you want to know — and more too. How *very* intimate you must have been with Judge Gayland!"

Mrs. Branstane's anger suddenly dissolved into ironic merriment. She threw back her head and laughed, laughed her fill, at Penning's innocent social cant about the "generous" Judge Gayland.

"Not to have known Gayland for what he was!" she laughed. "As I did — I, a woman! O-oh, you knew Judge Gayland for a generous, grand character, did you, Mr. Penning!" There Mrs. Branstane playfully poked her umbrella toward the President Judge. "And I suppose you fancied Mrs. Gayland was a 'grand' character, too?"

Suddenly, abruptly, she grew serious. The sting in Penning's cross-examination had struck home.

"So there *is* a little something in my 'business' that your brilliant intellect can't 'penetrate,' is there? Well, sir, here it is. I'll tell you what it is!"

The drawl had vanished, and with it the fine lady accent. Squarely and firmly Mrs. Branstane rose and stood before her chair, her umbrella gripped in one hand, the other tightly clenched at her side, — the instinctive act of born speakers, and of many bores. And to make sure of being heard before she could be interrupted, she fairly sputtered her words.

“Yes, sir, Mr. Penning; you were right about it. Indeed Mrs. Gayland *was* ‘taken in.’ Yes, sir; Judge Gayland was aware of ‘my knowledge of his private affairs’ — for twelve long years, for all his life, he was ‘aware’ of it. Leave it to me to inform you how Mrs. Gayland was taken in, as you say. And who did it. I’ll tell you, Mr. Penning, what financial trouble it was that I was so hard put to conceal. I’ll tell you why I was nothing but that woman’s servant. I can enlighten you about Judge Gayland’s affairs, and how I came to know them!”

Penning had risen from his half sitting posture on the edge of his desk, and was candidly laughing at this melodrama. His impulse was to thump over to the door and swing it wide for her instant exit. “Nobody cares for your tale-bearing!” the contemptuous comment escaped him.

Escaped him, because in another moment he would have recalled the words if he could. There had returned to his presence something other than the spurious fine lady of the minute before.

Mrs. Branstane drew herself up more rigidly than ever. With her head thrown back she looked him bravely in the eye.

“Mr. Penning,” she said, slowly and quietly. And her figure and her manner were not without their touch of dignity. “What I have come here to tell you

will hurt my pride to tell. I may have to say things about your 'generous' friend that will make you hate me. I may have to take away from you some of your pleasant ideas about him. You may shout as you please." Mrs. Branstane's lip curled lightly. "But I am here in the interests of two persons that I believe concern you — and that I am supposed to respect!" the sarcasm came irresistibly to her. "I *am* here on 'business.' Judge Gayland's affairs have got to be straightened out at last. And I see nobody but you and me to do it."

She was speaking very well. She felt herself improving. Mrs. Branstane was herself thrilled to hear Mrs. Branstane discourse in this fashion.

Penning, unaware that all this was the epitome of twelve or more years of ceaseless and loving rehearsal, was startled. Even rebuked. It might well be that he had done the woman injustice, and he undertook to be ashamed of his hasty conclusions.

Greedily Mrs. Branstane read all this in his face, greedily drank it in, along with all the rest of the intoxication she was drawing from this novel and delightful experience.

She laughed her low and rather musical laugh — one of her most effective features. A confidential laugh. At times insinuating. Full of subtle knowledge. "Mr. Penning," she was saying, with punctuations of this laughter, "if you were so very intimate with Judge Gayland, did he ever tell you much about his boyhood? Where he came from? What he was, back there in Hoytville? Ever hear of Hoytville?" More laughter. "I hardly think you've heard of Hoytville! You weren't that intimate with the Judge. No one was. Not that it need kill anyone

to come from Hoytville. I came from there myself. That's why I always got behind something and laughed when the Judge began to spout about his 'family,' his 'lineage'! But Hoytville-in-the-Backwoods is where he came from, all the same." Mrs. Branstane was speaking a little louder. The laughter had ceased. Her temper was rising, on the tide of these reminiscences. "Nothing but a clodhopper, that's what he was! Son of a lazy drunkard!" — louder still. At the next words Mrs. Branstane's control gave way completely and she almost shouted. "Got to be Judge, the fool, the strutting peacock. And he never deserved it — never! When I was nothing but his housekeeper, I that made him!"

Wider and wider Penning's eyes had opened in astonishment. As fast as he got the woman rated and adjudged, she upset his estimate. So, after all, malice was the mainspring, the animus of this Hagar's wrath.

"God hears me say it!" she was declaiming. "That man never should have been what he was, after what he did!"

Impetuously Penning whisked about, walked to the window beside his desk, and stood looking out of it, his hands behind him expressing their impatience, against the tail of his coat. A woman, not to be forcibly ejected, there was nothing for it but to wait for the mud bath to end.

Yet immediately again Mrs. Branstane brought him to sudden respect of her.

"Those whom Judge Gayland will have hurt the most, Mr. Penning," she said, slowly, quietly again, and as incisively as before, certain now of her effect, and anxious that none of it should be missed, "those

whom he will have hurt the most — are — the two other members of his family.”

Penning faced about, to meet what might be coming next. In spite of him, then, she was determined to rattle the Gayland skeleton. And he put himself in what attitude he could to hear the unwelcome truth.

CHAPTER III

THERE Mrs. Branstane began in real earnest. At the beginning. And truly astonishing was her eloquence as she recited her little *Inferno* — in which she had herself now so painstakingly drilled. She knew how to score “points” with it now. She knew its melting moments. The places for dramatic pause.

And before she had finished, of course, it was stretched outrageously.

“There in Hoytville, Mr. Penning, Judge Gayland and I were children together,” Penning heard her saying, while he industriously creased the rug with his toe and endured it. “Nothing remarkable about that, you say — everybody in Rossacre knows that already. Yes! But we were like brother and sister. It doesn’t know that. Going to school together. Eating apples and gingerbread out of the same basket. My basket, too! Oh, it was always my-y basket! Why, my father picked him up out of the very gutter. Took him to live with us. Fed him, when he would have starved. His mother was dead and his father a drunken lout. And yet after that, after all my father did for him, and my mother did for him, and *I* did for him — *made* him” — this was shouted now — “*made* him — that man could take advantage of my misfortunes and let me pass for nothing but a housekeeper! . . . And there’s more, Mr. Penning, there’s more — oh, you bet there’s more!”

Mrs. Branstane was now fairly smacking her lips over her narrative, in the ineffable joys of self-pity. Meltingly and long she strung it out, and halted now and again for the parenthesis: —

“That’s what I did for him — that’s what! And more, too!” Then the torrent of recollection poured on.

She told of Gayland’s turning out a likely boy. She told of her love for him, even as a baby, and of how it had been returned, and encouraged — very decidedly encouraged.

“But oh, he couldn’t kiss me — you know — for nothing!” she pronounced.

Then his being dismissed from their house. And his flight to Philadelphia. And the homesick — or was it the boasting — letter he wrote from there.

“Just begging me to come to him! Just begging me to come!” Mrs. Branstane cried. “O-oh,” she stormed, perhaps with some reason, and certainly with heat, “your elegant Judge, your fine gentleman, liked me then — fooled me then — when I was young and good-looking, and the catch of Hoytville!”

In Philadelphia he did find work for her, seeing that he wasn’t earning enough to marry. But such work! Took advantage of the impossibility of her returning home, and got her a place in a family. And she had to take the situation, or starve.

Then his second flight. And for ten years she had been left to shift as she could, with never a word from the young and rising Gayland.

“Ten years of that, Mr. Penning! Ten years of it! I was even a cook! What do you think of *that*, Mr. Penning?”

The flush on Penning’s face bespoke the rapid

efforts of his mind, and the quality of his ideas. He rather thought he was relieved to find the Gayland skeleton so far from the gruesome, so close to the conventional. Rather a respectable skeleton, he thought it.

Now and then, during this recital, he opened his lips to interpose — to protest, or even sympathise — for she impelled him to both. But each time Mrs. Branstane balked him with a redoubled volubility. The momentum of her feelings and sufferings would wait for no philosophy.

"Gayland? Oh, I found him again!" she pointed to Penning, as if *he* were the errant and the captured Gayland.

"The fellow was too hard bent on getting up in the world for me to miss him long! The wonder is that he could cover up his tracks as long as he did. Fool! He might have known I'd find him again. It was only necessary to see his name in a newspaper — 'Our prosperous lawyer and model citizen, Ira Gayland,' — and all the rest of the newspaper slush. My little Ethel went into an orphanage. I — *I* went to him! . . . Part of the way I had to walk — a good many miles of it. *But*, Mr. Penning, I found him again! I found him!"

Little by little Mrs. Branstane had forced for herself a short aisle among the chairs about her, in the need of physical as well as vocal expression. Here, being close to Penning, she tapped him on the shoulder and said, still more sententiously,

"You should have seen the gentleman's face, Mr. Penning, when I strolled into his office here in Rosacre! He wasn't glad to see me, do you understand? . . . I say, Mr. Penning, do you understand?"

Penning thought he understood.

Mrs. Branstane had wished to enlist his sympathies for herself, and she had inclined him unalterably to the cause of Gayland.

"Ye-es," he interposed unexpectedly, afire with protest. "I think I understand! But if he didn't love you, why did you pursue —" In spite of himself the word would speak itself.

"Hound him down all his life, eh? Why don't you speak your mind, Mr. Penning!"

"Not quite that way, certainly. But when he made it clear —"

"There it is! That's your man's way of looking at everything. But didn't I love him? Didn't he owe me something?"

"But still, he had —"

"O-oh, if he had the right to take advantage of me, I had the right to make him pay the penalty. Don't I know what was wrong? I hadn't the fine ways. I couldn't talk the elegant nothings, you see." Mrs. Branstane minced the words in mockery. "But I could have learned them. I *have* learned them. I allowed for *his* faults. They meant nothing to me. And when he tossed me aside —" Mrs. Branstane gestured the failure of her words. "He — he didn't want me."

Mrs. Branstane's breath caught in a sob. But she quickly rushed on.

"You too, Mr. Penning, you treat me — you always have treated me — like a brute. Just as Gayland was, you're a brute. Why, once *I* was kind and jolly! It's Gayland made me as I am. D'you suppose that doesn't help to grind me! You never think that I've got a life to live, too — the way a

life ought to be lived. Whether I'm happy or not means nothing to you, I suppose. It never did to Gayland. It never did to anybody."

Penning's eyes roved away guiltily. A demand on his generosity never waited for response. Mrs. Branstane saw the success of her stroke, and plied it further.

"So you see now, Mr. Penning, don't you! What do you suppose I felt when he told me he had a family now? When he had walked into his fortune on the very skin of my hands! Hadn't I *made* him? . . . Oh, he shook like a leaf, all right, when I walked into that office! Afraid of what I was going to ask. And what I'd do if he refused."

Mrs. Branstane paused for this point to sink home.

"But I asked for nothing, Mr. Penning. For the sake of my daughter, that he had sworn on his knees to provide for, I swept myself aside. I made one supreme sacrifice, for the other mother."

Another pause, for that point also to be duly attested.

"But never again could I trust that man. He had failed me too often. There was nothing for him but to take me in. I made that plain. And so up to his fine mansion I went, and there beside him I sat me down, to watch over my daughter's interests."

There Mrs. Branstane paused slightly longer, for Penning to respect her decision of character. Instead she read a hot condemnation in his face.

"Oh, you take the man's part, of course. You always stick by each other. Well, I can tell you this — if it wasn't sweet for Gayland, it was no sweeter for me. What was I, all the while? Only the horse in the treadmill, making the wheels go round. And

oh, he had his way of getting back at me — with his brilliant reputation, now, and his Judging, and his elegant dinners and dances, and trips abroad, flying high in the world, while I was left to take the crumbs from his table like a dog! Oh, he rubbed that in, as much as he dared! All the same,” — Mrs. Branstane laughed grimly — “he paid for that!”

A pause, but this time an immediate resumption.

“I stood it pretty well for a couple of years. But when he began to make love to me again, that’s where I began putting the screws to him. He was always making eyes at the cooks. But that was where my blood began to boil. Before that I used to believe it was just hard luck that I wasn’t about when he came to the marrying age. That’s what he told me. But there I got to know him as he was. And that’s where I began making the little Judge smart! So you see now, Mr. Penning, how Judge Gayland happened to be ‘aware of my knowledge of his private affairs.’ You see now who ‘took in’ Mrs. Gayland! Oh, I got to know the little Judge pretty well — a little too well for his comfort.”

Here Mrs. Branstane retailed a few of the Judge’s lapses in probity — certain passages with the lighter feminine element, a few flirtations with the law, too, most of them a tissue of her imagination, like the figment about her “daughter.” Yet there was nothing to warn Penning of these diversions from fact. Nothing was left to help him stem this tide of invective and damnation, and he breasted it mute, pained, and helpless.

“Twelve years of that sort of thing, Mr. Penning!” the fury raged on. “And oh, he didn’t relish it, either! For all his wild scramble after pleasure, he

got precious little of it. *I* saw to that! For a while *I* licked his hand. But not, not for long. What do you suppose *I* felt when *I* saw him take his fine family out in his fine carriages and cars, while *I*, *I* was left behind, to remember other days? What do you suppose *I* thought when the great and grand company flocked to his house, and toasted the fine gentleman, the brilliant legal light, and all that rot! . . . Twelve years with *that* in my heart — !”

Mrs. Branstane sent her body through the appearance of a wrench at the thought.

“Well,” she panted on, rather short of breath by now, “he paid the penalty. Oh, he paid it! And so has *she* paid, too.”

By lightning instinct Penning had taken a step toward her.

The action stung Mrs. Branstane, with its imputation, its revelation of Penning’s position still, in spite of her efforts to impress him in her favour.

“Oh, you needn’t worry,” she laughed. “The old fool doesn’t know what a side issue she’s been all along. Not yet, that is” — spoken grimly enough! “Reminds me of a brewery horse, so she does! And oh, it was sweet to me to see her go through the motions of being a fine lady, sometimes, and lording it over me — when with one word *I* could have crushed her little fool world like a cockle shell.”

And Mrs. Branstane reached out and crushed an imaginary something in the air.

“Hideous of me, is it?” her conscience intervened. “*I* suppose it is! But *I* don’t care any more. It’s too late to care. Why shouldn’t *I* get what amusement *I* could, while you and all the town were lauding that man and woman to the skies, when *I* was

the one that ran the machinery! I was the brains of it all. O-oh" — Mrs. Branstane turned in the general direction of Lincoln Avenue and addressed the distant Mrs. Gayland — "you poor old jade, I made you. Little wonder that sometimes the Judge wanted to come back to me. *He* knew. But that was where I could make the little Judge dance to merry music! He'll die of it finally."

An exclamation escaped from Penning. He was a sponge of mind in an ocean of discovery. This sorry history, this complicated character, flooding upon him thus, kept him tossing between sympathy for the woman's very real wrongs, and revulsion at each new unloveliness of character she exposed.

His gasp of astonishment Mrs. Branstane took for condemnation, of course, and she bristled at once with resentment.

"Aha-a-a!" She drew up a chair close to where Penning had sunk down on the low windowsill beside his desk, and seated herself on its arm.

"So! So that's the way you look at it, is it, Mr. Penning? Well, well! So you are like them all—for all they say of your grand manners. You elbow your own way along with never a thought of how much pain you may be giving to others. For some years you've been visiting that house of Gaylands, haven't you? And you saw me there — a servant apparently? And all the time you treated me like one, didn't you? For all I tried often to put us on a pleasanter footing. For years you ignored me. Pained me. And never cared. A-ah?"

Seeing the new surprise on Penning's face, Mrs. Branstane stopped for a moment.

"It isn't nice of me, is it, when everything is going

along so smooth, so much to your satisfaction, to show you that you're not the pleasant fellow you've been thinking yourself — the polished and grand Mr. Penning?"

For a second Mrs. Branstane had abashed him.

"I never thought of that, madam," he said. "I humbly beg your pardon."

"Oh, don't mind me, man!" she answered, magnanimously accepting his unexpected humility. "You're all right — a long way ahead of anybody else in this town. *You* know why you stepped aside in that nomination affair. You know and *I* know why you did it. I saw it, and said so, to the Gaylands, right at the time. And I say again, man, it was grand! That's what it was, it was grand!"

Mrs. Branstane even held out her hand. In another person who had "stepped aside," she recognised a kindred spirit, and she meant him to know it.

It was never to her taste, however, to have her felicitations received with too little enthusiasm.

"You do me too much honour, madam," Penning replied, with a touch of his irony.

Somehow Mrs. Branstane's felicitations were always being too indifferently received.

"So!" she said, and rose again. "So that's how you take me, is it? You can be fine and great to people you take as your social equals. But when it comes to — to servants, why —" She gestured her scorn.

"Well!" she concluded, buttoning a glove by way of indicating an end of the more sentimental aspect of this "business" they were to discuss. "Judge Gayland exerted himself a little to make respite to me — not much, but a little. The old sot blew

too much on his horses and his wines!" she interposed, always unable to pass a possible parenthesis in the direction of Gayland's injuries to herself. "And when I tried to make him see the idiocy of his extravagance, he went to work and spent all the more. But" — Mrs. Branstane now bent upon Penning the familiar knowing smile — "it will be interesting to see how you set to work and exert yourself, Mr. Penning, to wipe out your little slights to me."

Meeting another smile, of gathering comprehension, on Penning's face, Mrs. Branstane spoke more pointedly. "So! You laugh, do you? Well, if *I* can't make you see how pleasant it would be for you to change your style toward me, perhaps" — she paused, and then snapped out — "perhaps Miss Annabel Gayland can show you that. So I say, it will be interesting to me to see what sort of respite *you* expect to make."

Penning laughed outright and rose from his seat on the sill. So far as he was concerned Mrs. Branstane had finished. He had listened too patiently, as it was, and he would hear no more.

"I shall exert myself to see that Miss Annabel Gayland is freed of you as promptly as possible," he said with satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. BRANSTANE had come to Penning that morning with the original intention of being relieved of the onus of supporting the Gaylands and their household any longer. Still, she had come in a state of irritation. These drains upon her "savings" had nettled her. But chief of all she had brought her eternal zest for combat, her inveterate craving to dominate somebody or something. As usual her tongue, once started, had run away with her. Wild talk was one of her inexpensive modes of revenge upon a world that she always accused of abusing her. And now the wild talk had run so far beyond her innocent intentions that even she was amazed at being taken so seriously.

At the same time, it was not in the nature of Mrs. Branstane to retract anything once spoken. Having pronounced, she was accustomed to stand, whatever the cost, by her words.

Now she knew only that she had come to a point where any further extravagance of hers mattered nothing. The leash was off. She had ceased to care. And hustled by one of her free impulses, she threw back her head, laughing the while, and fell into a remarkable counterfeit of her former posture of injured innocence and dignity which had so impressed Penning with her sincerity, and quoted herself: —

"I may take away some of your dearest illusions about an honoured friend, Mr. Penning. I come here

in the interests of two persons who concern you deeply, and even I am supposed to respect!"

Then she laughed her low laugh.

With this flashlight into new depths in this strange character, Penning was the more stunned and bewildered. Where did her cunning end? Peering into her burning eyes, he read into them his own imaginings.

And noting this deepening suspicion of her sincerity, Mrs. Branstane laughed the more exultantly.

"Oh, come, come, Mr. Penning!" she said — willing, and daring, to say anything now. "Wake up, wake up! You love Annabel. The whole town knows it. Well, that's the way I loved my daughter. I'm rather fond of Annabel myself. She's the only person in this town who's been half way decent to me. If she knew the whole truth she'd be more fair to me still. Or I'm very much mistaken in that young lady. She likes me fairly well as it is. And has reason to. Good Lord, I laugh when I think of what I am doing for those women now! After all the years they've lolled in their silks and lived off of what was mine, when all the while I fairly had to steal for my daughter! I say, what do you suppose I felt to see such waste — the waste of my life besides, and my daughter's —"

"Yes — yes. Your 'daughter'!"

"Drat my 'daughter,' eh? — provided I ever had a daughter. Why don't you speak your mind, Mr. Penning?"

Mrs. Branstane had no daughter, but she had no intention of listening to any disparagement of even a figment of her fancy.

Still, by now Penning had floundered through to a few convictions.

"I'll speak my mind," he said quietly. "What I can't fathom in all this — this —"

"Rigmarole?"

"Rigmarole," he assented bravely, "is why you had to go up to Gayland's house in the first place. You might have known how it would be. Why did you stifle the man with your attentions, if he made it plain that he didn't want them? Nearly every human being has that experience some time in life. I don't doubt you have suffered. But every day men and women suffer as you did, and bear it with patience, while you —!" He gestured his impatience. "At any rate," he continued, "now that you have had your fill of revenge on Judge Gayland, as you say, why do you stay on up there, to worry these unoffending women. They're not —"

"Because —"

"— not to blame for any suffering of yours. I can't comprehend such cruelty. And you delight in it! I can't help doubting your sincerity."

More earnestly, more confidently Penning walked close to the woman — bore down on her with his charges.

"Your daughter, for instance. I wonder, now, have you really a daughter? I don't believe half of what you tell me. Probably you *have* suffered to some extent. Well, why, in God's name, do you prolong it? Why don't you go away? You have money. Why not go away somewhere where you can be happy? Go to this — this daughter of yours! Pah!" He turned away. "I don't believe you. No; I don't believe you ever had a daughter. You're not the sort of woman who has, who wants, children."

"No, Mr. Penning; you are right. I have no daughter."

Once before Mrs. Branstane had impressed Penning with a show of injured dignity. This time she caught him up with a burst of humility — some trace of it sincere. And again Penning was shaken and brought to the blush.

“No, Mr. Penning,” Mrs. Branstane said, “I have no daughter. My daughter is dead. Dead for ten years. It isn’t a pleasant thing for a woman to say, but I’m glad my daughter was spared the knowing of certain things. I was always afraid she might learn. But that’s one thing I’m saved.”

Mrs. Branstane paused. Fortunate thought, this “death” of her “daughter.” Now came another inspiration. In a flash her feigned humility was gone, — when she saw its success in abashing him.

“Ha!” she fairly shouted. “See how you insult me! I lie, do I? Well, I do not lie! Not when I tell you that all those Gayland women have is mine! Mine! Gayland knew that. He admitted as much. Me leave? Why not they, Mr. Penning? *Me* leave? *Me*? In one minute leave the life where I’ve toiled, and endured, and suffered? And *earned*? . . . Don’t you suppose I’m attached to this place? Could *you* leave here in a minute — here where you’ve made a world for yourself, where Annabel is, and all your interests are? Me leave?” Mrs. Branstane pointed a finger at her bosom. “I guess not!”

The clock in the court-house tower struck the hour of one.

“Ah! One o’clock. Well, Mr. Penning,” Mrs. Branstane laughed as she began to button her coat, “I merely dropped in to-day to pay you my respects. ‘Let us come down to business at once, Mr. Penning!’” she mocked. “I really did mean to consult

you about the Gaylands' money affairs. But we seem to have drifted into other matters, don't we! Well — it's just as well that you and I should be better acquainted — seeing how much we are going to be thrown together from now on."

There was infinite unction in her tone.

The last glove was buttoned. The umbrella was firmly in her hand. She was ready to depart. But she stepped close to Penning for a final word.

"Really, you amuse me. You think a person can go through every sort of bitterness at the hands of someone — and then gracefully forget it all and get out of the way and not be a nuisance when it's time someone paid for it all. Well" — she was turning toward the door — "I'm no such saint as all that. For all you read about 'em in the books."

Near the door she looked over her shoulder, to finish, "I shall surely have the pleasure of seeing you again. Good morning."

And she was gone.

Mrs. Branstane had talked quite enough for one occasion. The tincture of the actress in her, the artist, knew that here was the happy moment for an effective exit; and she swept away — leaving Penning to stare with open mouth at the space there before him, which this apparition had suddenly vacated.

CHAPTER V

ON the evening of that day, a good deal to the perplexity of Miss Annabel Gayland, Mr. Penning, instead of calling in person, sent a note to her, imbedded in a bouquet of violets. The note explained that pressure of business would keep him at work.

For three consecutive evenings pressure of business prevented Judge Penning from calling upon Miss Gayland.

There was ample excuse, of course, for the promptitude of his making an ass of himself. For the first time in his life he had been confronted with just the brand of womankind represented by Mrs. Branstane, and he needed time to classify it, and order it in his mind, and invent a way to meet it.

All those unpleasant facts about the Gaylands might after all be true; but he was outraged at being told of them. He preferred to live in illusion. At all events he had first to live out of this puddle of report and innuendo and statement that Mrs. Branstane had poured upon him. Then he might set about eliminating that dragon from their world.

The elimination, something told him, if Gayland had never in all his life been able to dislodge her, would only be accomplished with something of a wrench. Penning she affected as the hook affects a fish. But wild as he was to be free, he could see it was going to cost him a struggle.

For four days he puzzled how he should pluck out this barb. About him life went on as usual. As usual the town followed its ancient pursuits, some of them important. Kreisler came to give a recital, and Annabel should have been with him there. Certainly the problems confronting Senator Banks about then were apt to be important, and Penning's conscience made him acutely aware that he was due to help his old friend across his troubles. But they might wait as they could, while he ridded himself of his own.

Nasty, intruding, fixed fact, this that had thrust itself into his world! Lately he had chafed and girded at the pettiness of life in the town. Now it was going to be petty no longer. Now, as Mrs. Gayland had learned on her first encounter with this rude force in Mrs. Branstane, as Judge Gayland must have learned when she stalked into his office, as everybody must have learned who unluckily attracted the attentions of Mrs. Branstane, Penning knew that life was going to be unpleasantly different for him. . . .

But before he could find occasion for slaying her, Mrs. Branstane paid him another call in Court's Chambers, having watched her chance and chosen a season of business quietude rather late in the afternoon when the lawyers were wont to leave the Judge free to his official labours.

Penning happened to be out when she arrived, but he returned before her patience was quite exhausted, and she smiled upon him generously as he entered the door.

She might have dispensed with her sweet smile.

"So!" the Judge said, at sight of her. "Well, what do you want now?"

There seemed to be no further need of concealing his hatred.

At once Mrs. Branstane knew the mood she was obliged to meet, and at once attuned herself to its key. Her lips went tightly together, and her eyes narrowed to the familiar two slits.

"Better treat me with a little more respect, young man," she said; "if you know your best interests."

Penning laughed. Having given up his coat and hat to old Drumgoogle and sought his station behind his desk, he leaned over it and said into Mrs. Branstane's face,

"We'll waste no time to-day. I have determined that you are not to remain with Mrs. Gayland."

At which Mrs. Branstane took a turn at laughter.

"Make no mistake," Penning added, and for an instant Mrs. Branstane was silent in respectful study of him. "If you don't leave of your own accord, I shall have to pain Mrs. Gayland with the truth about her husband — and about you."

Again Mrs. Branstane's face relaxed into a broad smile.

"I see," she said, in the old "fawnciful" manner. "I see you don't quite appreciate my position. You fancy, Mr. Penning, that Mrs. Gayland is up there sick from the shock of the Judge's break, don't you? Bless you, my good man, it would take more than that to make that old jade so sick as all that — and for a whole month. What does she care about losing the Judge! The thing that grieves her is that she can't move in her old glory any more. That's what cuts her. The only thing that *would* cut her. And what's more, she thinks it's all her own fault. That's the disease *she's* got."

"So?" Penning pointedly doubted.

It occurred to him to let the woman run free for a

space. By letting her define her "position" more fully he stood to learn the more of her powers and how to meet them.

"Yes, 'so'!" Mrs. Branstane said readily enough. "Huh! Last week she wouldn't speak to me for two whole days — and why? Because I told her the Judge was a far grander man than *she* ever knew he was. And she was jealous. Jealous to learn that I knew him better than she did!" Mrs. Branstane laughed her low laugh. "And she took to her bed when I told her further that the Judge was where he is because of *her* neglect. Does that throw any more light on her — her 'disease'?"

Penning said, "Mrs. Gayland can easily be cured of that 'disease!'"

Only to provoke Mrs. Branstane to laughter again.

She was indescribably happy. This was delightful. What a toy she had found this man to be! Infinitely better than the fussy little fopperies of Gayland, that she had once loved to belabour — and would have belaboured even more as his wife! For a while Landis had pleased her, with his daring, his "nerve" — a nerve that after all proved to be nothing but a defiance of the decencies. And Mrs. Branstane had known Gayland long enough to classify clean nails and correct English among the decencies.

But here in Penning were decencies unknown even to Gayland — and twenty times his brains. And upon these brains Mrs. Branstane found herself playing as she had never been able to play upon any other. She was impressing the first mind in Rossacre.

Needless to say she went on with her impression.

"Don't deceive yourself, young man," she laughed. "I'd like to see you try to cure Mrs. Gayland of that

disease. You think you can prance up there and tell the Gayland women all about me and about the Judge, and save me all the bother of doing it myself. Don't you? But do you really know what they think of me? I've got a little temper. But otherwise they think I'm perfect. They couldn't get along a minute without me, and they know it. They need me to run their very minds — the way I've been doing, right along, for twelve years. Why, man, you couldn't utter one mean, malicious word against me to Mrs. Gayland, or to Annabel, either, but they'd both send you about your business in a second!"

At this point in these interesting proceedings there shot up before Mrs. Branstane six-foot-one and thirty-five years of vigorous masculine body and mind. The gentleman in command of them had gone very pale. His lips even were pale. One of his hands raised a convenient law-book. The other pointed to the door.

That much was instinct — the instinct handed down through many thousands of years.

In answer Mrs. Branstane curled her lip, tossed her head, gathered her skirts together with infinite care, not to gather more contamination from this atmosphere; and moved toward the door — in no haste, however.

"Very well," she said, airily. "I see I'll have to 'cure' Mrs. Gayland myself."

But Penning now had found the proper missile — not a book but a shaft of wit. "Ah, madam," he said; "you are far too good a physician to cure so paying a patient."

For a moment Mrs. Branstane wavered between an impulse to laugh at the pleasantry, and another to be furious at the insult.

Before she could obey either, Penning was pressing

on with this weapon of irony, unexpectedly effective. Studying Mrs. Branstane with an amused twinkle in his eye that quickly invited her sharpest scrutiny, he stepped from behind his desk, all suavity now, and began, —

“Really, Mrs. Branstane, it is very stupid of me. There’s something that I seem to have forgotten. Here are those heavy expenses you are under in running the Gayland household — all this while. Perhaps for years. I never thought of that till now. You’ll admit, I know, that the debt belongs to me. I believe I’ve been given to understand that you would be glad enough to be free of the burden? It seems to me you have expressed yourself to that effect. And I think we have come to the conclusion that you are an eminently truthful woman.”

He paused; and vainly seeking to fathom the intent hidden behind his faintly mocking manner, Mrs. Branstane looked him over. Suddenly this delightful mind, upon whose simplicity she had been playing, had become as deep as her own.

“Come now,” she heard his words interrupting her study of him. “Can’t we come to real business at last, without further misunderstanding? How much has it cost you?” He waited for an answer. And added the persuasion, “I’ll accept any estimate you please to give. Provided, of course, you give me also a discharge in full. . . . What do you say?”

Penning himself never suspected the closeness of his approach to victory over the woman at that moment. Taken unawares, with a lump of money — any lump she might name! — dangled before her eyes, Mrs. Branstane had almost surrendered the precious obligations she held over the Gaylands.

And caught herself only in the nick of time.

"Come!" Penning was urging, at her hesitation. "Isn't that a fair proposal?"

"It's a pretty fair sample of an insult!" she answered; for in the nick of time it came to her that the particular commodity he wished to buy at that figure must be too valuable to sell. "It's a pretty fair sample of what I've been made to suffer all along. . . . How can you think I'm as mean as all that! As if I begrudged those people a little help! As if my wrongs could be smoothed out with a little money! . . . I came here for your help in settling the future of that family. Anything wrong about that? . . . Hideous of me, isn't it, to bestir myself for that household, after the way I've fared there! That seems to make me a thief, doesn't it! I'm hounding the Gayland ladies, eh! What other beautiful thoughts like that have you got in your mind, Mr. Penning? . . . O-oh! —" she turned away, choking.

In some fashion her intention of blazing with anger had flickered into a glow of self-pity instead. And it was serving, Mrs. Branstane was surprised to find, even better. This sort of thing touched him, she saw; where anger only set them at loggerheads.

"We-ell," she sighed, with her face still averted. Even dabbed a handkerchief to her eyes. And moved in sorrow to the door. "I know *one* person, anyway, who doesn't think such things of me." And with the appearance of just having suffered the cruellest wrong of all, she was gone.

As the door closed behind her Penning stalked to a window and stared out of it. But all he saw was the clear conviction that in succeeding to Gayland's honours — such as they were — he had succeeded to Gayland's problem as well.

CHAPTER VI

NEVERTHELESS Penning promptly set out to slay the dragon.

Four consecutive evenings he let pass without a visit to the Gaylands. On the fifth, in compliment to a special invitation to dinner, he set out from the Club with a good eager half hour to spare, for a preliminary stroll. Something of an evening it was, on the verge of March, with even a few abortive hints of Spring in the air. Two or three times a year, perhaps, late February will put on this accidentally genial mood, when a blue-bird may arrive, and the air invites to song. Penning was so moved, at his shaving.

He was going to slay the dragon.

Vigorously he swung his stick as he sauntered up the Avenue, and leaned against a breeze that pushed out the tails of his light grey topcoat and filled his nostrils with the scent of pines blown down from the hills.

The asphalt rang with the hoofs of horses home-driven from their first excursion out into Spring. In almost metropolitan frequency Fords and street-cars whined past, bearing down town Saturday night shoppers and seekers of pleasure. The sidewalks were thronged with millhands in Sabbath raiment. Constantly Penning's hat was off his head in reply to salutes from passing carriages and motors or passing pedestrians. Workmen eagerly saluted him and gladly he responded.

"Fine man, Judge Penning! Not afraid to know a body when he sees you!" Half a dozen times Penning sent that sentiment strutting down the Avenue.

One idea alone marred the satisfaction of the young Judge. The dragon was not to be slain without, possibly, a few interesting moments for all concerned.

That might be as it would, he decided. The thing must be done.

And on reaching the Gayland gateway, he tore up the path to the door with the precipitancy of a boy in an orchard. Up the steps to the piazza he leaped three at a time, and gave the bell a push as long as his patience was short. Old Berkeley, whom Annabel had vainly tried to discharge along with Delphine and Jonathan, opened to him with that grand bow which was as much a fixture in Rossacre as the leafing of the trees in Spring. Grandly the old fellow assumed the responsibility of his hat and coat, and Penning moved into the great hall.

There, tripping down the stairs to meet him, at the sound of his ring, was Annabel. A new Annabel, with a new gladness in her eye at sight of him, with a quieter though a warmer welcome in her arm outstretched to him.

Only, the other arm was twined about the comely figure of Mrs. Branstane.

Arm in arm they descended the stair. And it transpired that this was not the evening for Judge Penning to slay the dragon.

He was not in the house ten minutes before noting that the Gayland ladies were grateful to Mrs. Branstane for many small favours, and were even glad of her company, precisely as she said. And so their disillusionment was not to be painful, simply; it was

going to be difficult, too. The dinner-table he had intended to leave as it should be, a festival. But those quiet and intimate moments afterward, about the fire in the library, when he might have Annabel and her mother to himself, for the gentle, the delicate masterpiece of idol-breaking that he had carefully rehearsed — those moments were denied him. Mrs. Branstane too was there, not simply on equal terms with them all, but the life of the party. Well she might bubble and effervesce, for she alone of them all was free of care. And she made the most of her opportunity. The Gayland ladies themselves had never seen her in such form, and were plainly proud of her.

When Mrs. Branstane once left them, to find a bit of the Judge's old cognac, Annabel herself forestalled any word that Penning might have contrived to hint against her, with such a burst of impetuous and genuine gratitude as it would have been impossible to undeceive.

"Oh, Pen, she's been such a friend! You simply can't know what she's been to us. I tell you" — and in her eyes, as she turned them up to him, was frankly brimming all that she strove, in her bubbling chatter, to conceal of her private dear self — "I tell you I've learned a lot in the past few months. And it makes me ashamed to have such help coming from where you least expected it. It's such a shame *not* to expect it. . . . Isn't it?" she put to him candidly.

And what could he say? . . .

With this tax upon his patience Penning was at once laid open to one of Mrs. Branstane's more indirect effects upon his fortunes. The March term of

court was at hand, and with it his first presidency over the legal differences of the County. Toward that term Penning and Penning's admirers had looked with eager anticipation. Now at last they were to have exhibited to them the master's touch at such business.

Yet when the time came, Penning found that, try as he would, his zest for his work was by no means what he could have wished. Other matters, galling and nagging irritations, were on his mind. He made no mistakes, of course; but his labours, when they were finished, made no better than a simply adequate showing, an ordinary accomplishment.

Possibly he understood, then, why Gayland had made no wider reputation as a jurist!

Whatever he understood of Gayland, he understood of himself that he would tolerate not a moment longer an existence of such quality. Out with the thorn in his flesh!

That firm resolve notwithstanding, the calendar of that year ran on, rained on, sleeted, snowed, thawed on, into April itself, before it brought to Penning the special opening so long denied him by duty and difficulty. Again, that first week in April, a fortunate gap in his professional engagements and a dinner with the Gayland ladies made it now or never for him.

By then the relicts of Gayland had returned to something of their normal life, and to something of their former spirits. The shock of revelation need not be spared them on such grounds now.

This favourable atmosphere Penning sensed the moment he had entered the door, and Annabel came bounding down the stair to greet him in the old way. All in brown, and all in smiles, her arms about a

great bunch of roses, she came tripping toward him. Three paces away she halted and curtsied, and suddenly darkened the great hall with a severe frown.

"No card with 'em!" she pouted. "Course they 're your roses. No one else thinks of sending me roses now. But it annoys me to have you know that so well. You 're so sure there 'll be no confusion. . . . And where have you been for four whole days again, Sir — without a word of explanation — except these beautiful things?" — kissing his roses. "You needn't think they can take your place."

"They 're taking it now," was Penning's pointed rejoinder. And a burst of approving laughter from midway down the stair published the fact that Mrs. Branstane had been a witness to the pretty scene.

Something must have happened to Penning's face, for Miss Severity promptly made note of it.

"Sir-r!" She stamped an accusing foot. "I know where you 've been. You 've been working to death. Just as father did. I see it in your telltale face. It 's pale. And lined. And I never saw it so grim. I believe it 's been grim for a month, come to think of it." There she defensively buried her own face in the roses, with her eyes peeping over them, coaxing for confidence. "Come, tell me. What 's the matter?"

Ordinarily Penning would have advanced upon the rose defences, but with the audience on the stairway looking on he chose to stand his ground and lie playfully,

"O-oh, I 've been ill."

"Ill!" The roses fell precipitately to the floor.

"Yes. Sick with apprehension."

"Apprehension? Of me? Oh! Then I 'm sicken-

ing?" She haughtily accepted the lifted roses from his hand.

"And I've come to the cause of the malady — for a homœopathic cure."

"You certainly take your treatment in homœopathic doses!"

Hastily Miss Annabel retreated from his effort to take one.

"But such treatment as I get!" he, baffled, pouted in disappointment. "Reproach seems to be the only drug in your cupboard, Dr. Gayland. Berkeley, old fellow" — for Berkeley, old fellow, was privileged to potter about like some movable piece of furniture — "don't you think I'm just racing for the grave if I keep on with such a doctor?"

"Don't you think he's just racing for the grave, Berkeley, when he will let his doctor prescribe nothing but sweets?"

"Well, mum, Hi expects your prescribin' does him a heap of good, no matter whut it is, mum. But to me, in a manner o' speakin', he seems to be a-racin' for the haltar, mum."

"The halter! Quite right, Berkeley! That's all the bridal arrangement ever comes to!" Penning laughed.

With a general groan they all fled after that, partly in play and partly on business, Annabel to the assistance of her mother in her dressing, always a desperate problem for one of her bulk, and Mrs. Branstane, summoning Berkeley with her, to the culinary purlieus, for a final review of the dinner arrangements; and so they left Penning alone.

Left him grinding his teeth. Pretty feeble substitute, this sophomoric passage, for the moments with

Annabel that he could always expect to be touched with a delicate grace. It seemed to be impossible for Mrs. Branstane to be anywhere without immediately poisoning the atmosphere. Even Annabel recognized the necessity of dragging the conversation down to the level of that woman's comprehension.

Already she had made herself felt in his work. Was she to be allowed to spoil the savour of all the rest of his life?

Not if he knew it! The moment they all returned he meant to blaze out. Make short work of it. . . .

He was still staring these firm intentions into the answering blaze on the hearth, when he heard a titter behind him, and then a light touch on his arm. Turning, he stared astonishment instead into the blazing cheeks of Annabel and Mrs. Branstane. Arm in arm they dropped him a twin curtsy, and he was startled to mark, with the firelight playing upon their faces — Annabel's all roguish, and Mrs. Branstane's wearing a mocking smile — how near of an age they looked.

"A penny for your powerful thoughts!" Annabel giggled. "They must have been sweet and to your taste. You never heard us. And you haven't yet told me how I look."

She caught out the skirt of a fetching little frock in the most demure of browns, and began teetering about in the steps of an impromptu dance, for the more perfect display of it. A kiss and a hug — for Mrs. Branstane — ended the pirouette, and with her chin on Brannie's shoulder she admitted to him sweetly,

"This lady bought it for me. Wasn't she sweet? We call her our 'counsel for the defence.' I can't remember all the wonders she's done for us, while the slow-pokes are fixing up our affairs."

By that time Mrs. Gayland had got herself compressed into her attire — perhaps with many questionings of the Lord's purpose in depriving her of Delphine — and she too joined the group in the hall, now waiting on the two carved oaken benches flanking the fire, for the announcement of dinner. Still with her arm about "Brannie," and perhaps with a feeling of the — the honest jealousy of Penning, she thought it, Annabel chattered her head off, in her zeal to have them in accord. And finally, as how could he help it, in the warm flood of Annabel's sunny cheer, he melted.

"Oh, well, well!" he inwardly groaned. "A little later, then!"

Indeed, before he was aware of it, he was chattering himself, to Annabel at least. She quite approved of him as he sat with the firelight flickering over his bold features — iron in repose, "melted iron," Annabel called them, whenever he talked or was interested.

"Oh, by the way, Miss Gayland!" he said once. "I — I hear you are engaged. Is it really true?"

"I should say your hearing is very acute!" she had back at him.

"Well, ma'am, however that be, you have my very best wishes!"

"I certainly have need of them!" And they all laughed.

"Some Judge, I learn. Must be a most excellent judge!"

No saucy reply was admissible there, and for reward of his elegance Penning was permitted to kiss — one of his roses, thrust into his face.

After due celebration of that, in a moment or two, Mrs. Branstane felt herself encouraged to a trifling

contribution to the evening's entertainment. Annabel had been moved to sympathy with poor Senator Banks. That afternoon she had passed in the company of Sylvia, from whom she had garnered the highly human fact that, painful as was the present state of their affairs, a pack of poor relations was due for a visit. Whereat Mrs. Branstane archly observed,

"What a pity the Senator has no money left! If he wanted to be rid of his poor relations, he might lend them a little."

"Oh-e-e!" Annabel laughed. "What a cloven-footed saying!" And Auntie Bran was suitably kissed, in applause of her wit.

During the evening, it happened they were regaled by sundry other bursts of wit from Auntie Bran, for she was not long in seizing her own part — and carried it off amazingly well.

Truly an astonishing performance, Penning himself was obliged to acknowledge it.

All through the unruffled smoothness of the meal Penning had constantly to marvel at the front put up by the woman. At any near approach of her he had expected to smell brimstone. Instead he surprised himself with more than once swelling the merriment she raised, with her touches of anecdote, or strokes of characterisation. There in Judge Gayland's dining-room, the realm that above all others in his house was intimately his own, with its excellent paintings, its handsome period furniture, all of it costly and antique, with an old Heppelwhite side-board glittering with silver — in that very domain Mrs. Branstane had seated herself with the others, in full communion with them all, and kept them amused, and kept Penning from blurting a single re-

mark in her disfavour. Almost she made him forget that she had ever been anything but the kindly companion and friend. Never had the two Gayland ladies themselves seen her in such form. Even Mrs. Branstane was amazed at this expansion of herself, in response to an audience. Annabel's eyes danced in astonishment, and pointedly twinkled at Penning, at this parade of fresh marvels in her pupil.

In the beginning Penning set it down as a masterpiece of effrontery. Later on he thought better of it. Mrs. Branstane disclosed a truly remarkable faculty of mimicry. In succession she took off Senator Banks, and Walker Landis, and Mrs. Landis, and Isabel Warren, and other worthies of the town, till Annabel rocked in merriment of the satire, and even Penning was moved to laughter.

And when they returned to their seats before the fire in the hall there was still more banter and conviviality. And all the while Penning listened in wonder.

Beyond question the woman possessed gifts — talent, of a sort, and nothing less. As he watched Mrs. Branstane he could trace in her, in this ready gush, the belated consciousness of defeated power. With training, with education and opportunity, he was soon willing to concede, she might have taken easy precedence over all but one or two women he knew in the town. At least, though he grudged to, he could understand Annabel's stubborn prepossession in her favour. It was simply that things which he had been tardy to discover had long been plain to Annabel, and he was forced to a humble respect of her judgment. Indeed, in his humility, he was so willing to battle his prejudice and do justice to Mrs.

Branstane that before he left he was ready to see in her powers of mimicry, in her flexible and expressive voice, in the gathering authority of her manner, not simply everything that Mrs. Branstane herself was eager to assume, but something of the artist besides. After all, given the favourable atmosphere, it was not beyond reason to think of her gift as flowering out into something of importance. It was not beyond reason to think of her as an acceptable addition to the stage.

And so he took his leave, about eleven that night, and sauntered down the Avenue, and climbed the stairs to his snuggery, and touched off the logs on his hearth. With Sherry Brookes in Philadelphia then, in search of new presses for his paper, Penning was comfortably alone. And having lighted a briar and doffed his coat, he sat for a long while and contemplated his fire.

"She's clever!" he was obliged to admit. "In her way."

CHAPTER VII

TILL a very late hour that night Penning sat and mused before his fire, in review of the case of Mrs. Branstane.

Was she an essentially vulgar woman, with a fatal touch of cleverness? Or was she a truly gifted personage, for ever fettered to an element of vulgarity, and never to be free of it?

In either case, he could see, was inevitable tragedy.

After all, what were the woman's errors and outbreaks but the natural rebellion of a baffled ambition? Certainly she must have seen in herself very nearly the cleverest woman in the town. Or that, with the necessary advantages, supplied at the right time, she might have been such. In Mrs. Branstane's circumstances, Penning wondered, would he himself have been content with a revenge so gentle upon niggardly surroundings?

And he had urged Mrs. Branstane to surrender, to renounce everything, and leave!

No matter. The Mrs. Branstane he had to deal with was the Mrs. Branstane who was, not the notable figure who might have been. By reason of his very yielding her claims to existence, she was to be the more a problem in his career. And respect her powers how he might, he hated her the more.

He loathed her. She muddled all the currents of his life. And yet, how was he to compass the removal of an incubus so firmly fixed?

Meanwhile there was his new work in the Judgeship, with its new interests, its new demands upon his time and mind. And his gathering interest in Annabel Gayland, beautiful as a merry girl, still more admirable now in the new trials that were taking her on into womanhood.

Strongest tug of all upon his heart, just then, was the unhappy situation of his best friend Banks.

The more so because it was next to impossible to speak of the thing. In the old candid manner. With a little candour the whole Banks imbroglio might have been avoided. The Senator had kept to himself his dealings with Landis, and so had got into his tangle only because he knew his venturesome faith could never survive the scrutiny of an eye at once friendly and expert.

And yet, for all Penning thought he could mark a physical change in the man, the Senator's good nature remained what it was. He so bravely and so deceptively bore his blunder as his own.

"Well, well, well!" Banks still could welcome Penning when he called. "Come in, old fellow! Hang your hat on the ceiling. It isn't quite so roomy here. But Sallie used to wish we lived in a flat, where she needn't be worried by thieving servants. And now you've got your wish, haven't you, Sallie?" he would beam upon his grim and unresponsive wife. "Well, never you mind, dearest. Never — you — mind. One of these days we'll be back in the old place — or in a better one still. I have to remind her over and over, Pen, that I'm still but a lad of 52, with my future all before me. It's a little hard on Sylvia, though, because —"

"How silly of you, father!" the lovely girl would

interrupt, and leap upon her father's chair, and throw her arms about his neck.

"Because she can't entertain — and attract — her friends, in the good old way. But that's all right, Sylvia. Soon enough you'll be entertaining more handsomely than ever — with opera singers from New York, by ginger! Wait and see!"

"Yes!" Mrs. Banks would comment bitterly, under her breath. "Wait and see!"

All his life the company of Penning had been a tonic to the Senator, and so, in the presence of his friend, he would lick up his spirits.

"Let's see, Sylvia. Where was I?" he would run on, but spouting, Penning could see, only to keep up his courage. "Oh, yes! We've got the house rented, Pen. At a pretty fat figure, too. That is, for Ross-acre. The dear departed Landis has had his stuff shipped to Philadelphia, and the new railroad superintendent, Sayres, has taken the place — at twelve-hundred a year. I guess that'll help some, what?"

"Splendid!" Penning would agree. "But I'm disappointed."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to buy that house myself. Willing to pay a smart sum for it, too."

"Oh, but I've got to hang on to that house! Think how it ties me fast to my future! . . . No; as long as it's mine I can walk past it and say to myself, 'There's your goal, Banks.' It will spur me on, don't you see?"

"But of course I'd sell it back whenever you wanted it."

"Oh, I see!" And the Senator would lower his eyes. "That's like you, Pen. But it's got to be

business with me, through and through. . . . I'll be pitching into you soon enough, all the same. You made me, once, Pen. Maybe you're slated to do it again. Lord, I'd never have got anywhere if it hadn't been for you. If you hadn't beat the city for me in that gas case franchise. Sallie used to tease me about making my fortune in gas. Didn't you, Sallie! But that was my real start, just the same. And you did it, Pen. I'll never forget it. Weren't they some surprised, when you, a young kid out of Law School, beat all the old hands here, and won me that franchise! Funny, for a chap so young to give an older man like me his real start in business!"

"But you gave me my first case, Senator."

"Well, we began together, you might say, didn't we!"

But that topic always reminded the Senator of his dearest project for Sylvia. Perhaps it reminded Penning also. At any rate he hastened to add,

"What do you say, Senator! Let's begin together again!"

"You're on! I'll see you to-morrow!"

And the Senator did "see" Penning the very next day — in Court's Chambers.

He stepped in mysteriously, almost on tiptoe, and drew up a chair beside the Judge's desk.

"Pen," he began. "I beg your pardon! Your Honour! Let's see — how old are you?"

"As I live! Life-insurance!" thought Penning. And such was the Senator's errand.

Dutifully Penning put himself down for an amount needlessly large, and on the strength of his order he ventured to break down the Senator's reticence on the score of his affairs.

In vain Penning besought Banks to some compromise with his creditors.

"It isn't your fault if Landis has fleeced them!" he counselled. "Isn't it a bit Quixotic to take the whole burden on your own shoulders?"

To no such argument would the Senator listen.

"Joshua Banks pays his debts — somehow."

And that ended it.

Some few facts, nevertheless, the Senator did divulge about himself. Never had he been so rich as Rossacre liked to make him out. Like Gayland he had been hugely overrated.

"The town's got to have rich men to brag about, you know. People gossip us into wealth."

For the time being he was fumbling about till he could hit upon some new field of business venture and start afresh. Until he could find what he liked he had taken up insurance, which he expected to go famously while his supply of good friends held out!

"How about a political job?" Penning queried.

"Nothing doing. It was different when I was in office and had money. A strong man can get anything, a weak man nothing. I know. I worked on that principle myself!" the Senator laughed ruefully, and mused a moment. "I see things differently now. . . . But never you worry. Old Josh Banks'll get going again, never fear. Stronger than ever. You can't keep a good man down, ha, ha! Sallie scolds me, a little. Says it was nothing but stubbornness that got me into this pickle. If only I'd listened to you, or to her, or even to little Sherry — who's a brick, by the way! Wants to lend me money. Only, of course, I can't accept it. Because it's my own fault, I know. I did have faith in Landis. Gave

him his start in life, you know. . . . Probably it *was* stubbornness. All right. So be it. It's the stubbornness in me that's going to set me going again. Sylvia herself's going to help me. She thinks it's going to be such a lark. But now then, young man!" the Senator abruptly broke off. "It's your turn on the anxious seat."

The Senator drew up his chair a little nearer to Penning, and glanced about the empty room in a precautionary manner.

"Tell me frankly, as man to man—as an old friend—" he whispered that—"isn't there a little something worrying you? Seems to me you're not quite as usual, yourself. Knowing you so well, I notice these things, you see. But isn't— isn't something bothering you? Some trouble of your own?"

Penning administered a quick slap to the Senator's fat knee.

"Banks, you're a brick! I *was* rotten on the bench, my first time out. And you want to scold me for it. In your nice, roundabout way. . . . Well, you're right. I *was* rotten. And — and I have been a little cut up—"

"About me, I'll lay you a fiver! Why didn't you tell me!"

"We-ell, ye-es. About Gayland, too. Quite a racket in the town, all at once. But—I promise you I'll behave better next term of court. You see!"

They chaffed each other a little while longer, and then the Senator left.

When he had gone Penning strode to one of the windows and studied the naked little square outside with a curious interest.

"The insurance was only a pretense. He came here expressly to tell me that!" he thought to himself.

Was it so clear, then — clear to the whole town — that he had fallen off? Was his work so far as that beneath expectation?

The absurdity of his situation kept Penning musing some while at the window.

And he was only aroused from his reverie at the entrance of Mrs. Branstane.

CHAPTER VIII

PENNING was a figure of amazement as she entered. She had donned something comfortable to the mode. Something in advance of the moment in Rossacre. *Vogue* has commended worse habilaments. She was smart. Smart from her trim grey boots to her furs and the saucy furry toque perched upon her neatly waved hair. And she was handsome. Offensively, aggressively, handsome.

Handsome by reason of something other than clothing. She glowed. And yet there seemed to be a strange timidity in her manner.

Because — on the occasion of Penning's last dinner engagement with them, when he was so curiously impressed by Mrs. Branstane, Mrs. Branstane had been as curiously impressed by Judge Penning.

She too, when the Gayland ladies had retired, and when she herself had locked the silver in the safe and made the windows secure, drew up a chair before the glowing hearth in her own room at the top of the house, and sat staring into it till very late, with a somnolent cat on her lap.

As the small French clock on her bureau struck two she pushed the cat from her lap, and looked at the empty hands that lay there, and said to herself, "No. He — he hates me."

Still the hearth had a few expiring flickers left, and with a kind of grim satisfaction Mrs. Branstane watched them die.

Then she rose, and slowly kicked off her pumps. And again her thoughts worked to the surface in speech.

"No. He hates me."

And she set out across the floor, in her unshod feet, in a noiseless, nervous pacing, up and down, up and down her room. The cat, awakened rudely, and hiding in a corner, watched her with misgivings. For some minutes Mrs. Branstane paced.

And then abruptly stopped, and placed her hands upon her hips, and said to herself, aloud, "No. He only hates me. And . . . and well he may!"

There a strange thing happened. Being near the bed Mrs. Branstane flung herself across it. And burst into sobs.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned, with her face buried in her hands. "Why am I like this! . . . Why does it always turn out this way!" . . .

For an hour longer she tossed about on her bed, in a passion of tears.

And perhaps with good reason.

Not in vain had she absorbed the charm of their evening together, Penning and Annabel and Mrs. Gayland and herself. There, about the dinner-table and about the fire in the hall. Yet "things" had always turned against Mrs. Branstane, somehow. And so she might weep.

From that evening on Mrs. Branstane did make some effort to grip herself. With the effect of shocking Mrs. Gayland almost out of her wits, so unaccustomed was that lady to the phenomenon of good-nature in her crusty handmaiden. And she almost expired of apprehension when Mrs. Branstane

even asked her advice on the purchase of a new gown.

Toward Penning a thousand new impulses urged Mrs. Branstane now. A dozen times a day she set out to see him, and a dozen times drew back. Mrs. Branstane needed an audience. It was the need of an audience that had sent her, in the first place, to Penning when Gayland's illness had deprived her of the old one. This new audience she had found intelligent and tractable beyond her dreams. And it was an audience at last worth her while. It seemed to Mrs. Branstane that the more intelligent the audience the more she had to display. So Penning flattered her, and so the more she craved his flattery. For that she loved him. The dear, desirable man!

Such was the comedy played by these two persons — Mrs. Branstane trailing Penning, and Penning whetting all his knives for Mrs. Branstane.

Meanwhile the good people of Rossacre lived on. The trout season opened, and likewise the season of golf, with insidious invitations to the manhood of Rossacre. Twice Mrs. Branstane attempted a call upon Penning in Court's Chambers, only to encounter a discouraging crowd of lawyers gathered there. With what reason she could she excused her intrusion, and withdrew.

The round of Spring teas was on, moreover, and recruited the dear ladies in gossip.

One of these teas, of a strongly missionary character, at the resplendent new home of Mrs. Bemis, Miss Gayland thought it a duty if not a pleasure to attend. And in the true missionary spirit she took with her Mrs. Branstane — and so became more than ever an instrument in the hands of Fate.

At Mrs. Bemis's tea Mrs. Branstane fell in with all the amateur aristocrats of Rossacre, people in the second line of wealth, and breeding, and travel; the sort that Sherry Brookes had once, and finally, characterised as the ten-thousand-dollar millionaires — all of them making the same use of the occasion as fell to Mrs. Branstane. Here they might foregather, on an almost equal footing, with the very great ladies of Rossacre, the hated angels who really dictated the tenantry of the social heaven of the town — Mrs. Wentworth, Mrs. Wyeth, and Miss Warren, and the rest. And among the malcontents and aspirants Mrs. Branstane was at once ingratiate.

Cleverer than Mrs. Bemis, or Mrs. Travis, or any of them, there was not one among the number whose pedigree or fortune Mrs. Branstane could not trace back to something inconvenient, to say the least. And they were all charmed and grateful for her tact in forbearing to do so. Mrs. Branstane sparkled, but took pains to surpass nobody else. Dispensing all manner of cutting remarks, she nevertheless pointed them carefully at absentees who, she was quick to perceive, were the least favoured by those present.

"Why, she seems just like one of us!" they all agreed, when she was gone. "You should hear her tell of Mrs. Gayland's stupidities! And as for the Judge and his bluffing, it's no wonder he's where he is!" And soon they were all copying Mrs. Branstane's very tricks of speech and of manner.

Mrs. Bemis having safely experimented with her, still others of the same group took her up. Mrs. Cloud asked her to a tea, and at length no less a person than Mrs. Brantley sent her a card to a bridge.

Among these people Mrs. Branstane learned quickly

enough how to get on. She subscribed to their charities, she visited their sick wards. In a word, such was her smooth and rapid progress up the social pathway, that at length she found herself a guest at the Brantleys' reception, the very final function of the season. There, it happened, rounding a doorway of a sudden, she came into collision with no less a personage than Senator Banks.

"Murder!" the Senator gasped, when it happened. "What are you doing here!" he asked, very candidly.

Mrs. Branstane passed him with her head in the air, and later a terrible revenge fell in her way. A crowd had gathered about the Senator, in respect of his remarks about experiences of his in climbing the Alps.

Watching her opportunity Mrs. Branstane sweetly observed, "But then, Senator, you've always been so used to the high places?"

This delicate allusion to the time when Joshua Banks laid finial bricks on Rossacre chimneys silenced him for the remainder of the evening, and was afterward widely quoted.

Others, who thoughtlessly combated Mrs. Branstane, learned also to respect the perils of her memory. Still, while it lasted, it gave Mrs. Branstane at least the success of the hangman.

Now and again at these social gatherings Judge Penning encountered Mrs. Branstane, though his surprise at the first of them almost resulted in apoplexy. Finally Annabel Gayland organized a tea of her own, especially to enable Mrs. Branstane to repay a few of these many obligations. And Judge Penning condescended to be present, though he contrived to arrive very late.

Mrs. Branstane, now affable to all, and fairly beaming toward Penning, felt reasonably sure that she was impressing him. Certainly he gave no sign to the contrary. Surely he must be ready now to acknowledge that she was a personage.

So always when Penning called on Annabel, Mrs. Branstane saw to it that she too was nigh. Duly she made her appointed remarks, when occasion offered — and yet said little, in the main, her past mistakes with Penning had made her so timorous.

Mrs. Branstane was carefully feeling her way.

Penning, poor fool, was amusing himself with the notion that he was biding his time, that he was toying with the dragon, till the right moment to pounce and finish her off.

Since he might not suddenly open Annabel's eyes to the dangers of her new friend, he would trust to Time to open them.

That entire April Penning left Annabel's eyes in the care of Time. For him it was a season of busy professional preoccupation. The March term of court was past, and the May term yet to come, yet there were sundry court orders to hand down, there were conferences with counsel, petitions for new bridges to consider, and a thousand and one small affairs of the County to be weighed.

In the thick of all this business Mrs. Branstane attempted several visitations, without success until the last one.

"It isn't likely," she was saying then, meaning to be arch, and so to add to the fetching effect of her physical appearance, "it isn't likely that you — ah — desire a receipt for this?"

As she spoke she was folding a roll of bank-notes

into her neat patent-leather bag, along with a new bill from the grocer, and the tax account on the Gayland property.

Judge Penning's taste for humour happened to be inert at the moment, as well as his patience.

"Yes, I want a receipt!" he blurted. "For business reasons, and for personal reasons, I want a receipt. In due form. For that loan. You don't come here in magnificent philanthropy for the Gayland ladies. I don't know — *God* only knows — why you come here. Personally, I haven't the time to puzzle it out. But I want to know exactly what is done with the money."

Mrs. Branstane's thoughts, as she heard this, spoke chiefly in the rising flush of her cheeks. For a moment she looked at him, this original Penning that again stepped forth just when everything had been going so nicely.

"You get off cheap, young man!" she began, slowly. "You big politicians have a slick way of setting fools to work for you. You flatter them — and get out of them whatever you want — and then toss them aside."

In spite of all her noble resolutions toward good nature, Mrs. Branstane feared she was growing angry again. Nevertheless, she tried to be calm.

"I suppose you thought you'd work me, didn't you?" she drawled on. "You took thought and decided to treat me as a lady, till I had paid nearly all of Gayland's debts. Then you could step in and say 'ta, ta!' to me, eh? . . . Well, I'm not to be duped that way!"

"Duped!" Penning leaped from the chair at his desk. "My patience! As if it were *you* who were

duped! This has gone on far enough. Busy as I am I have fiddled and fooled with you long enough. I give you three seconds to get out of this room, and three days to get out of this town. Out with you! Take your dragon mind with you! Do your worst! Go!"

Penning even pointed an obliging finger toward the door.

Mrs. Branstane sat where she sat before. She laughed quietly, indulgently. She enjoyed this sort of thing.

"Oh, you're clever!" Penning granted. "You know I won't brain you. But, good God, don't you know when you're insulted?"

He thumped over to the heavy door opening on the corridor, and swung it open.

While Mrs. Branstane laughed. Seeing that the door was open she spoke a trifle the more loudly, for any chance passerby outside to overhear.

"'Dragon mind.' . . . 'Do your worst.' . . . Isn't your breeding deserting you, Mr. Penning?"

Mrs. Branstane's temper was rising, in spite of her, beginning to spur her tongue. "Those are not nice words, Mr. Penning — 'dragon mind,' and all the rest. O-oh —"

She held up a staying hand as Penning essayed speech.

"Annabel Gayland said to me only yesterday, as I kissed her good bye, 'Auntie, do you know, I haven't asked *your* permission yet, have I?' She had dreamed of you, she told me. 'Do *you* like him, Auntie? Do *you* approve of him?' —"

"You — go! Or I shan't answer for the consequences!" Penning cut in.

He was walking toward her.

Mrs. Branstane only rose from her chair and stepped forward to meet him. And looking him full in the eye she said to him softly,

"Don't be foolish, young man. You are fast in a turn of affairs that I happen to have mastered. You know well enough that I can tell things to those two doves about Judge Gayland that would level them to the dust."

"Well, then, damn you, go mention them!"

In precipitate disgust Penning tore away from this festering presence.

"You fool!" Mrs. Branstane tried another tack. "To have done all you've done, for that squirt of a girl! What can a man like you want with such a millstone round his neck! That's what you are thinking, yourself, this very minute! Do you know what she said to me this very afternoon, when I started away? Her mother was worse again, and Annabel was worked up over it. She threw her arms about my neck and sobbed" — and again Mrs. Branstane's mimicry was cruelly exact — "'Oh, Auntie dear, you've been so good to us! We never can do without you! Why, when I'm married, you've got to come and keep house for *me*! The world couldn't run on without you!'"

In the quotation Penning could recognise only too clearly the perverseness of Annabel.

"And yet, Mr. Penning, you order me to clear out!" Mrs. Branstane laughed. "You who are not nearly so strong up there as I am! . . . And I don't believe you want to be, now. . . . And I don't know as I blame you!"

Though Penning boiled to say something, Mrs. Branstane fairly shouted him down.

"Housekeeper? *Me* that girl's housekeeper? She'll be mine, before then! The twittering canary!"

"Great God!" Penning whipped in.

"Aha-a-a! You wonder at me, do you? Oh, you can't shame me now!"

There was a genuine catch in Mrs. Branstane's voice as she said that — and realised where her tongue had carried her again.

"Oh, I know what I am!" she blundered on, seeking to retrieve her lost position. "I'm a failure, and I know it." Here she turned upon him fiercely. "But why shouldn't my failure be borne by those that have made it!" . . .

Penning, moved restlessly about by his fiery irritation, had moved slightly behind her when that bolt stopped him still. And from his momentary silence Mrs. Branstane knew she had arrested him again.

"Oh, yes, hell!" he said. "But if it's such a pain to be where you are, Mrs. Branstane, for God's sake why don't you leave? That's the only way to simplify things. I don't say leave Rossacre. But leave the Gayland house and set up for yourself. That's the only sensible course."

No answer from Mrs. Branstane.

"Can't you do that?"

A shake of her head.

"Why can't you do that?"

There Mrs. Branstane turned upon him.

"You fiend! You fool! I come here — Oh, I don't mean that, I don't mean that! Forgive me! I'm a brute! . . . But I come here — I want sympathy, I want to be treated like a human being, I want — Oh!—" She gestured her impotence in words. Tried

to glare some comprehension into him. She wanted to rush upon this simpleton and seize him bodily.

And caught her breath, to save herself from saying anything of the like.

"I see," Penning was saying, in irony. "The question is, not *can* you go, but *will* you go? That's it, isn't it?"

"Yes, it 'is it'! And I *won't* go. Here's where I am, here's where I stay! That's all."

And out of her purse Mrs. Branstane ripped the money she had just received from Penning, and the bills it was to pay, and threw the cluster into his face; and bustling past him out the door she left him standing there, loathing her the more as she puzzled him the more.

CHAPTER IX

BEGINNING with that afternoon Penning let it be known, to whomsoever it might concern, that he was a desperately irritated man. Even Miss Annabel Gayland was not spared the knowledge.

Rather a momentous day in her life, when she made that discovery.

All unconscious, she had been bubbling her gaities to him when he came to their house. She sang him songs all the way from Schubert to Strauss and Wolff — and sang them very well, if you please, with a new catch in her voice, implanted there by recent experience of life. She played him Debussy, in her talented manner, and other new things, and Beethoven and the old things — with that “Consolation,” midway, which Senator Banks thought was by Schlitz.

In a word Annabel performed for him every ministration, every sweet service save that one which Penning desired above all others — the compendious dismissal of Mrs. Branstane. Did Penning call, with his eager zest for new accomplishment, to talk over his work with his one sympathetic listener, or think to read a new sonnet by Masfield or Mahlon Fisher, or some scrap of critical lore from William Stanley Braithwaite or Edward O’Brien — Mrs. Branstane’s willing arm had always to be about dear Nabbie’s neck. Always Mrs. Branstane had also to be basking in the eternal sunshine which was Annabel.

Of all this the upshot was that the Hon. Andrew began to be subject to fits of extreme and mysterious abstraction, which Annabel was left to interpret as she could and pleased.

"That hideous Judgeship!" she would exclaim. "Penning, what do they *do* to you at the Court House that grinds the life out of you like this! Here you are, going the same way as father. You come here at the end of your day *so* tired, and bored and woe-begone!"

And Penning could only laugh lightly — for he too was stubborn, now, in his own way.

If a wiser suspicion ever dawned upon Annabel — that he might be a bit jealous still of her championship of Auntie Bran—who had done so much more for them than *he* had ever done, by the way! — why he might get over that as he chose. Penning might as well know at once that Annabel was not quite a wisp of straw. She was entitled to her own opinions of people. She too was somebody, as she would have frankly told him, if he had been as frank himself. Since he pleased not to be frank, she trusted him to swing into good humour again when it suited his lordly fancy to do so. If he meant to be nasty to Auntie Bran, she meant to be only the nicer. That was all.

Meanwhile, still like a good daughter of Eve, she plied him with what soothing she thought he required.

Naturally the wrong kind.

She thought of new drives for them, over the hills. Thought of a hundred new amusements. Finally, as the weather opened, it occurred to Annabel that Penning should play some tennis with her, on the court behind the house, that it had just broken old

Berkeley's back to cut and roll and mark and get in order.

"You haven't had a lick of exercise in weeks!" she scolded. "There! I'm glad *that's* settled," she sighed as she finished with him that evening — and so created the little occasion that proved to be momentous for them both.

Dutifully Judge Penning stole that appointed afternoon from his duties, as he was commanded to do. And lawn tennis they sallied forth to play, all in festive flannels and blazers. Rather a good hand at the game Penning had been in Harvard — won the college championship on one occasion.

But it is a significant fact that Auntie Bran also sallied forth to the tennis court with them. And Annabel, who was moved to be gay — for the afternoon invited the mood, with its early birds and the first soft breezes of early summer among Annabel's tawny tresses, which they most notably and bewitchingly tossed — Annabel took the notion into her pretty head, perhaps a little maliciously, that she should first have an educational set with Mrs. Branstane, with the skilled Penning seated nigh to coach this promising pupil.

"She's got to learn this business, you know very well, Pen. And you're to watch her up and see that she gets on. Now, then, Auntie, blaze away! This is the way you do it. Watch me."

And bless us if they didn't fall to, with Penning stranded on the rustic bench by the side of the court designed, very properly, for the relief of the weary.

When, finally, Annabel condescended to take him on, why, somehow, the net had sagged, possibly because Mrs. Branstane had leaned against it in the eagerness

of her learning. And the court turned out to be indifferently rolled after all — no better than a plowed field, it seemed to Penning. And Annabel, wearied now with the first games of the season, played wretchedly out of form. Penning, smarting with a hundred small annoyances, played even worse. Every ball that left his bat was sent by Fate into the net, or out of court. Even his respectable service went wrong half the time.

And as if all this were not enough to try a patience already unduly strained, Annabel persisted in the barbarity of conversation. Raising her arm to serve she would lower it to say,

“Oh, by the way, Pen, did you know that Jack Keating and Madge Brantley are engaged? And what do you think! Isabel Warren has a steady! Yep! A new chap from New York.” . . .

Every smallest function in life that afternoon seemed to have been fashioned into a thorn for the tender feelings of brother Penning. And the inevitable did what the inevitable always does.

It happened.

They had a dispute, he and Annabel, over the score. At any other time Penning would have been amused at the girl's perversity, and left it to the morrow to bring melting conviction of error. But for once in his life Penning was minded to have his own way — even on the microscopic point of a misunderstanding of the score in a game of lawn tennis. Then and there that injured being stood his ground and insultingly proved himself to be right.

“A-all right, Pen!” Annabel carolled her submission, and only sheepishly gestured apology for her blunder. And they went on with the game.

But for the first time in their acquaintance Penning had actually, and unmistakably, and deliberately, wounded Annabel.

He knew that on the morrow he would be sending her penitential roses; but he could speak no penitential roses then. Rather he behaved very stiffly and took himself away earlier than he had intended — “to meet a business appointment.”

Annabel also retired that evening a bit earlier than usual, incensed at Penning, and carrying herself too a bit stiffly.

And was vaguely worried, nevertheless. For in that ever so slight friction between them she thought she descried the thin fine line of a cleavage. Large consequences may follow small occurrences. So thinks youth. They may escape the eye, but never the youthful heart.

As usual, after that, Penning and Annabel drove about over the country, now beginning to be ravishingly beautiful in its early summer garb. They played golf, too, and called on friends in the evening, and went to the teas and dances at the Country Club, and otherwise behaved as two people in entire accord. Yet always Penning discovered himself in the company of a young lady who, always a bit shy in the presence of his mightier intellect, was now more shy than ever, and hesitant, before him. At home she chattered a little the less to him, was at a loss for topics of chatter.

So multiplied the small hurts which these two precious idiots imparted to each other. In some fashion Penning's own clever speeches, his pretty compliments to Annabel, his epigrammatic comment on life and on people, all the sparks that Annabel

had been wont to strike from him, came grudgingly and stiffly now.

In Court's Chambers too Penning began to puzzle the lawyers with his fits of temper and sarcasm.

All the handiwork of Mrs. Branstane, of course.

What Midas touched was merely gold. What Mrs. Branstane touched was uproar. And by no means had she exhausted her magic in that line, either.

After that indifferent, and to himself disappointing, March term of court, Penning had sworn by the Great Horn Spoon that at the next term his townspeople should witness a markedly different sample of his powers as a jurist. When the May term should arrive, he would show them what a Judge can be.

Yet a Judge must bring to his labours an inexhaustible patience. With an unwearied interest and attention he must pursue every turn in the sometimes painfully trivial disputes that are heatedly and laboriously threshed out under his guidance. And that patience, when the May term arrived, Judge Penning had not at his command.

From the very first day things went ill.

A Judge is commonly supposed to be an impersonal machine, automatically registering between right and wrong, as the issues are presented, no matter how clever, how stupid, the pleading. All the honest blazes of a personal indignation are denied him. All too often he must sit aloof and watch a legal wrong defeat a moral right, before his very eyes, with thought of nothing but the letter of the law.

One such clash was early on the docket — a relic of the late but not tearfully lamented Landis. That prosperous citizen, it seemed, had advised the trustee of an estate to sell the option on a property at a

certain sum. Ten days after the advice was taken and the option sold, the trustee had half a dozen fancy offers, and the purchaser had sold at a profit of \$10,000, after a liberal sharing with Landis. Against Landis there was absolutely no hard-and-fast proof, and yet he was clearly at variance with the legal and the moral law.

During all this business, as a Judge will, Penning was taking notes. But they were not notes for a judicial decision, nor for a charge to the jury. Under the temptation to expose such wrongs he was quoting that brilliant journalist, Franklin Clarkin,—

“Fiction is the only place left where a man can tell the truth.”

During a squabble over a petty money affair, he jotted down—

“If you want to see a man with the eye of God, borrow or lend with him.”

In the thick of a case brought by the trustees of the hospital, perfectly willing to welcome poor patients to the public ward, or to sell private attention to the well-to-do, but seeking to collect by law for treatment to the wife of a salaried clerk, the Judge wrote, —

“There are two classes of rich people — the rich and the poor.”

Such was the quality of thought in the presiding Judge.

And things continued to go ill, day after day. Plunkett, district attorney, a man whom Penning valued as a friend, drove the Judge nearly distraught in one particular case, with his ceaseless objections. More than once the prosecutor's objections, argued out by opposing counsel, trapped Penning into hasty and testy decisions on points of law — decisions that

raised professional eyebrows, that made causes for new trials, or appeals to a higher court.

Not much to the honour of a Common Pleas Judge.

At length, the particular case that engaged them being of nonsensically slight importance, and Plunkett's objections being of unwarrantable frequency, Penning once blurted out,

"Plunkett, proceed, if you please!" Then he added, "When will you learn how to conduct a case!"

The whole court-room pricked up its ears at such a remark.

"Never, before this court!" Plunkett retorted, forgetful of himself.

Penning rebuked him, savagely. And Plunkett, under the lash, replied with spirit, until every mouth in the room was agape as Penning, in a voice high and strained, roared out,

"I fine you fifty dollars, sir, for contempt of court!"

In reality he was fining Plunkett for having lost him his own self-control, there before them all.

"I've certainly had my money's worth of the commodity!" Plunkett said hotly, as much beyond himself.

"The fine is a *hundred* and fifty dollars! To say nothing of proceedings to remove you from office!"

There the whole crowd, lawyers and laity, openly gasped. . . .

Throughout the remainder of the session the smart of that clung to Penning. Thought of it blunted the fine point of his attention. Always Penning's mind was a sentence or two behind the testimony or the argument. More than once counsel had obligingly to repeat to him portions of their remarks, or to clarify

their statements, that the Judge might catch up and focus his vision more acutely on the points at issue.

There were consequences of this, as a matter of course. Surely enough the Argument Court immediately following was stuffed with prayers for new trials, alleging judicial error or oversight. Like hawks the lawyers, till lately his rivals, now sifted the Judge's every word and move, to see where they might trap him. Some of them baited him brazenly, with unwontedly worrisome Gordian knots to sever. Even the lay mind was entitled to its opinion of the judicial conduct. Fragments of this criticism Penning overheard in the Lincoln Club itself. . . .

They had but a single virtue, those days. Crowded as they were with business, they offered Mrs. Branstane no single opportunity for intrusion!

CHAPTER X

YET though Mrs. Branstane was not able herself to touch up the Judge, she was able to reach him by proxy.

By the unwitting agency of Senator Banks.

Not having seen the Senator for above two weeks, Penning was thunderstruck by the little man's appearance when, after Argument Court was ended, he timidly entered Court's Chambers.

The Senator was shrunken. From a stout, ruddy little fellow he had become thin, and pale, and grey. His trousers sagged from the waist, over his vanished belly. His coat dropped loosely from his shoulders. The shoulders themselves seemed to have acquired a suspicious stoop.

But the chief change was in the Senator's face. The cheeks sagged, flaccid, with the puffing all let out of them. In sagging, they had drawn down the corners of his mouth. With his excess flesh the customary neatness of the Senator's dress had likewise vanished. His nails were rough and untrimmed. His hands looked soiled.

"Penning," he said, laying a worn Derby hat on the Judge's desk, and beside it a leather case, "I'm going to show you a book without which no gentleman's library is complete. You are an educated man and will be able to appreciate the value of what I have to offer."

He opened the flaps of a sample book, each flap

exhibiting the character of a separate binding — the usual equipment of a book-agent.

"This is 'Clark's Improved Compendium and Selection from Our Favourite Authors.' In this volume — of generous scope, as you will see — you will find all the genuine pearls of thought from the world's greatest thinkers — Emerson, Plato, Napoleon, Robert G. Ingersoll, and all others. If you want an appropriate quotation for an after-dinner speech, or a thought for an appeal before the bar, or an ornament for everyday conversation, you will find it here."

In wonder, in pity, Penning looked him over. So clearly was the Senator spouting the carefully memorised phrases of a prospectus. On an impulse Penning was minded mercifully to cut him short, and said,

"That's quite right, my friend! Put me down for a dozen copies."

But immediately he discerned that Banks was seriously, desperately in earnest about it all. It was "business." And Penning patiently heard him through the rest of his rigmarole.

"I see you are impressed by the merits of the work." Spouting mechanically, the Senator was leafing over the pages of his sample volume. "You will want it lying on your library table, for all your friends to see. Now as to bindings —" And so on, and so on.

A little longer Penning let him run, and then he said,

"It is truly a wonderful work, my dear Senator. I shall want a dozen copies, against next Christmas — saving one for myself. I may want even more later on. Meanwhile, how does it go? Pretty well?"

"Not very."

Penning's homely and intimate query seemed to summon the Senator from some distant region — called him back to the old familiar footing. He gazed up at Penning wearily, trying his best to be his old self, seeking to ignore the difference that had crept in between Senator Banks and the courtesy "Senator" who was there to sell an old friend a worthless book. And his eyes filled as he gazed.

"Not *very* well," he amended, and allowed his eyes to travel away to the open space visible through the windows. "If it hadn't been for you I shouldn't have sold any copies to-day. But you've more than made up for my average sales. A dozen copies! I haven't lost courage, you understand," he looked quickly back to Penning again. "Only—the business opportunity I've been looking for doesn't seem to materialise. I never would have believed it could be so hard. In my time I've helped a good many people here. But when a man is down, everybody seems to enjoy his come-down. I suppose the failure of a man who has once been up in the world makes every other fellow a little more contented with his lot."

"Have you nothing in view?"

"Ye-es. There's a little laundry for sale on Edison Street. A good plant, too. I believe the right man could make something of it. You know what the ordinary laundry is in these days. But I—I have no capital of my own, and —"

"Banks!" Penning swung round in his chair till the knees of the two men touched. "You know that half of what I've got is yours! I'd say the whole of it, except that before long, you understand, I may assume certain obligations —"

A tear stole down the Senator's cheek.

"Of course you understand the — the pride a man may have," he said. "I couldn't accept charity. Sherry, dear boy, has offered to set me up for life. But of course I can accept only what is necessary to start me going again. You see, I *must* get going again. . . . But if you and Sherry could take stock, say, to the extent of \$5,000, I'm sure I could get a foothold in that laundry business. And from that reach out, and gradually get rehabilitated again. You see?"

In a timorous eagerness Banks watched Penning, as instantly the Judge swung about again, and opened a drawer, and wrote out a cheque in his book. From another drawer he drew a box of cigars and a silver cutter.

Almost greedily the Senator selected a smoke, and, smiling the request, tucked two more into his waistcoat pocket.

"U-um!" He blew a cloud of fragrant vapour toward the ceiling. "Afraid this will spoil my taste. But I can't resist it."

With the feeling of money in his pocket, and a good cigar going, a swift change came over the Senator. He leaned back in his chair, and threw out his chest, and thrust a thumb into the armhole of his waistcoat, and began to expand. Expatiated on his swift recovery of his wonted place in the town. Feverishly jovial he became — as if he knew this rare moment of relief from his worries was to be relished to the full while it lasted. For twenty minutes he became the Senator of old.

In the midst of this expansive humour, the Senator's eyes narrowed shrewdly, and he waxed serious, even mysterious.

"Penning!" he burst forth, slapping his thigh. "Do you know, my friend, I never in my life saw a funnier sight than you made — er — when you were first — ah — in love!"

The Senator laughed, a bit over-loudly, to blunt the force of this candid observation. And Penning courteously joined in the laughter, though he was frankly puzzled.

"Yes, sir! by gad, it did come down on you like an avalanche, didn't it!"

"Ye-es," drawled Penning, "it did."

"Yes, sir; that's just what it did!" the Senator reaffirmed, and hesitated. From his eye it was clear that he was still far from his point, and was himself puzzled how he should reach it through this elaborate diplomacy he had opened. "But I say, Pen," he stumbled on, "aren't you — aren't you a long time in getting over it? Eh?"

Again the Senator tried to laugh, but only tittered, in a sickly fear lest, now that he had spoken, he had wounded a friend, a benefactor.

And Penning answered nothing, but only wondered, wide-eyed, at what might be coming next. And the Senator hastened on, to allay the smart he saw he had left.

"Yes, by gad!" — and again turned his embarrassed gaze out of the windows. "I — I *admire* a man that will take on like that. Over a girl! By gad, sir, there's something fine in a man like that! I — I wish *I* were that kind of man!"

Still Penning said nothing; but now he could smile perfect comprehension at this kind-hearted, blundering friend.

There ensued a painful pause.

Then Banks started off abruptly in a tangent key, since it was impossible to go on in the first. "By the way, Pen!" he snapped his fingers, as if at a sudden recollection. "How about our duck-hunting in September?" It was then early May. "You haven't forgotten it? Better get old Barney Grimm to oil up your gun, hadn't you?"

Penning smiled on at the poor man's transparent subterfuge.

"September's a long way off, Banks," he said quietly. "I may be pushing clouds for a living by then." . . .

For half an hour longer the two men smoked on. But their talk kept stubbornly to the stiff and the stilted. Work with it as they would, the conversation died, finally. And when the Senator could stand it no longer he hurriedly betook himself away.

Penning, when he heard the slam of the heavy door and heard the click of his friend's heels on the tiles in the corridor outside, sank into one of the hard walnut chairs and laughed aloud in his bitterness.

So much he wanted to be touched by the Senator's intended kindness. And smarted instead.

Could that have been Banks's errand, instead of the sale of the book?

Was his lapse from the former Penning standard — his down-coming, to put it bluntly — so obvious as all that?

He stalked to the window. And laughed, and laughed.

CHAPTER XI

WITH the month of June came exquisite days — and the regular term of Criminal Court. With the exquisite days came the truly full tide of golf, and rides over the country, and afternoons in a canoe — and more of Mrs. Branstane than ever.

If, after a round of golf, Penning chose to taste a cup of tea on the club-house verandah, Mrs. Branstane was sure to be there, on a like errand. If Mrs. Brantley required his presence of a Saturday evening at her lodge along Blackwater Creek, Mrs. Branstane was sure to be one of the party.

The quality of her conversation may be imagined.

For the most part it consisted of, "As I said to Mrs. Bemis," or "As Mrs. Cloud said to me." . . .

Sometimes Annabel and Sylvia were of the company. But oftenest they were not. Mrs. Branstane was established now, on her own independent footing.

This freak success of this freak woman affected Penning on the side of bitter laughter. Her utterly calm conscience, her utterly smooth progress, in the face of the waste she had laid about her, was exquisitely droll. Gravely he would shake her hand, in subtle irony. When occasion presented he would sit with her, and rattle off the wildest ironies, gravely, dreamily, as if tossing out offhand gems from a rich experience of life.

"You must have noticed, Mrs. Branstane," he would say, "how silly it is to be friends with any but

buoyant people." He even called her "Mrs. B." once or twice. "You know, by living with disheartened people we gradually come to borrow their disheartenment."

Or it might be, "Never lend money to anyone that you admire."

"Pardon my presumption, Mrs. B." he would add. "But advice is often golden. And this is the kind that you can coin into money. Think of that!"

These subtleties never penetrated Mrs. Branstane's slower, if equally forcible intelligence. She took them as the frankest flattery. These golden thoughts she took home, and pondered them. And recalled who it was who had said them. And exulted.

By now, though she still saw him seldom, she felt on splendid terms with him. It was clear, clear beyond peradventure, that he was impressed. She was charming him now.

So certain this seemed that Mrs. Branstane began to be inflated. She put on airs. Outlandish airs. To the Gayland ladies this prodigious progress of their modest pupil was an ever more and more astonishing phenomenon — when they had inclination to think of it. Even to the exasperating Mrs. Gayland she was never harsh now, except when that good woman innocently dragged in some lingering intimation of proprietorship in Penning.

For the most part they kept to themselves now, and let her go it. Annabel had just returned from a visit to her father in his sanatorium. And the report she brought back was of a sort to set them apart, and very much together. With the result of leaving Mrs. Branstane pretty much freed to come and go as she pleased.

By then she was no longer absorbed in the invention of excuses for visiting Penning in Court's Chambers, since there was always the chance of her meeting him almost anywhere outside. In "society."

Meanwhile, under the young Judge's outward ironies, blazed an irritation that every smallest circumstance seemed to feed.

The irritation, for all he tried to curb it, followed him into the June term of Criminal Court, for instance, and there found stuff in plenty for its flames. On the docket, to cite but a single example, was the case of Charley Brady, which had stirred the interest of the whole community. For days before the trial the papers were full of the sad state of the Brady family. During the trial the whole countryside read the evidence and followed every step in the proceedings against Charley. Charley Brady also had been a darling of the town — in his way a smaller Penning. Everybody had known smiling Charley Brady the newsboy. Everybody had wished to be waited on by Charley the cheery clerk in the best Rossacre grocery. Everybody had smiled approval at Charley's appointment as bookkeeper in a bank. And everybody had rued, and sympathised, when news came of Charley's peculations. His parents were poor and sickly, it was remembered in his favour. Every indulgence was open to Charley at his trial — except the evidence and the Judge.

During the trial the evidence and the Judge both had been in grim humour. With the consequence that Charley got the extreme penalty of the law for his little slip.

And Penning got the extreme penalty of public opinion for his own little error on the side of severity.

Again he learned that a Judge is not permitted to be an automatic machine for infallibly registering justice. Sometimes society decides that nothing is more terrible than justice, and will have the very Judge who serves it before the bar of its judgment as if he himself were the culprit. . . .

After that term of court Penning encountered side-long glances on the street, and overheard the fag ends of hastily-ended remarks as he moved among his acquaintances at the Club.

And this with a crack at the Congressional nomination not many months away! . . .

As this clumsily concealed tendency on the part of his friends to censure him reached the point of an acute annoyance, Penning chose to flock by himself, and leave them to say what they pleased. He set out upon long and solitary walks across the hills, and in the evenings developed a taste for the privacy of his rooms and the company of a book — though he paid more attention to the poetry of the sky, paged in the oblongs of his windows, than to the poetry of life as he found it on the pages of Dostoevsky, or Wells, or Dreiser.

Finally his absences invited more comment than his presence in Rossacre society. Of that also Penning heard rumours.

Very well. If peculiarity was the thing they had come to expect of him, peculiarity they should have, and enough of it.

“Deuced queer sort!” society pronounced of him.

“A fading issue,” said the politicians.

Indeed, as time passed, such was the declension of Judge Penning in the esteem of his townspeople, that Mrs. Gayland herself was able to note it.

"Just see what you are doing, Annabel!" she scolded one evening, when the two ladies were at home alone, and Mrs. Branstane was with a party at auction. "You've been so saucy to him! For shame, my daughter, for shame! You'll lose him yet, I tell you, if you're not more careful. He seems so quiet when he is here. And you do nothing to cheer him."

One person only in Rossacre refused to be mystified by the conduct of Judge Penning.

Trust Mrs. Branstane to fathom the reason of his peculiarities, his odd seclusion, his now infrequent calls upon Annabel. Great, fine, honest fellow, he scrupled to pay court to Mrs. Branstane under the very nose of Annabel and Rossacre; and yet could invent no means of getting rid of the incumbrance.

Very good. Mrs. Branstane would help him to be relieved of it. By then she herself had seen too little of Penning, and since he was too timid to seek her out, she felt an irresistible impulse to seek him. As a toper seeks the bar. It was nearly a month, now, since she had seen him.

Her opportunity came on the occasion of a Ladies' Day at the Club. It took her a full hour to edge away from the crowds about the tea and auction tables, and steal away, upstairs, as if to one of the cloak-rooms reserved for the guests. She was certain that *he* was above stairs, a flight or two farther on.

And he was.

CHAPTER XII

PENNING had drawn up a wing-chair before one of his open windows, and from its depths he was studiously observing the sky. His feet, in red morocco slippers, rested — and ruminated — on the sill. And he was bitter — unutterably, and beyond all power of computation, he was bitter.

Not because of this business solely. This was only the culmination. The top note of a long crescendo. From the day of his father's early death in debt, from his mother's later death in grief, and his gambler brother's death in the gutter, down to the renunciation of Sylvia — always this giving up of things. Always somebody's debt or burden to assume — with no reward but a beggary of purse and a starvation of desire. For as long as Penning had had a memory, it was a memory of these renunciations, of sacrifices forced. Always, after a modicum of opportunity, after a little effort and a little progress, the dropping of these sudden blank walls across the path.

What, or Who, did it? Who ordered these impositions upon him, while other men, and often ignoble men, were left free to their own, and often ignoble, devices?

We used to call it God's will, and think it ordered for some subtle and wise refinement of the soul, and were resigned. Nice consolations this improved age has to offer to the afflicted! Scarcely anything, it seemed to Penning, is left us except a tinkle of touching music in the ear.

Nice loftiness of soul *he* had acquired! With every warm impulse, with every brotherly inclination, these trials of his, impossible to share, had driven him in upon his shyness, and made him "enigmatic," and "peculiar." Hungry for affection, he was cruelly left to his "aloofness," as if it were something self-imposed. No one approached him.

O Lord, he was alone!

Except for Annabel. . . .

The thought of Annabel dropped upon him like the splash of a stone in a quiet pool. He rose abruptly, and uttered his confusion by rufflings of his hair. And moved about the room, his hands in his trousers pockets, his head bowed.

After all what credit might he take for resigning his claims to Sylvia — more than for resigning some lovely picture that belonged on other walls than his own? Only then did it strike him what was Annabel's value — or what had been her value. He saw then how hungrily dependent he had been, all along, upon her inquisitive innocence. No one else had so beautifully ignored his "peculiarities," and trusted him in spite of them. Sweetly and simply she had invaded his reserve. Waded in, that was it. And what was his bounden gratitude for the service he had never estimated till then.

Only, Annabel was so ready to wade innocently out again, and wade elsewhere, without discrimination! And he sat down again. And leaned forward on his knees. . . .

Pah! He was pitying himself! He was your familiar "misunderstood" man! And he laughed aloud.

Laughed on — at the complete drollery of the

situation. All this complicated hubbub at the instance of an unwitting, a stupid, an utterly inconsequential woman! Whom it was difficult, or impossible, to combat to any effect.

For some time he sat so, and thought; or sat without thinking; when a faint hum caught his ear. Something that sounded like a muffled "Yoo-whoo!" And came from nowhere in particular.

"My stars!" he thought. "Am I beginning to 'hear' things?"

The sound was repeated, more distinctly, from his door. "Yoo-whoo!"

Glancing round the wings of his chair he leaped up in astonishment as he caught sight of Mrs. Branstane, and gasped, "As — I — live!"

As in a trance he watched her, while, in a visible improvement in the grace of her manner, she coolly laid aside on his library table a light scarf — of excellent lace, if he had cared to observe — and stood before him in a gown of a light brown, bordering on the yellow — daringly away from the sober and non-committal, at all events, and draped in scrupulous fidelity to the mode of the moment.

That is to say, it was cut almost as low at the throat as a ball gown, and almost as brief in the skirt as a bathing suit. At the corsage, as at the hem, it offered to public view the candidest possible comment on the structure of a woman — in this case a bosom and a pair of ankles that would have invited a passing glance from St. Anthony.

This frank physical appeal Mrs. Branstane emphasised even more as she seated herself in the other wing-chair by the library table, smiling mischief the while, and bent forward with her hands neatly clasped.

The bosom was a bit further uncovered, and so were further intimations of a handsomely turned calf. Perfectly conscious of her effect, Mrs. Branstane's cheeks glowed, and her quickly moving brown eyes sparkled brilliantly in her excitement.

The tableau ended in a saucy, intimate smile, and the remark, "And now, please, sir, mayn't I have a cigarette?"

With a grand flourish Penning drew out his cigarette case — the gift of Annabel — and swept it before Mrs. Branstane; afterward choosing a smoke for himself. Touching a match to his visitor's weed, he lighted his own, and then stepped back where he could lean against the table. And there he indulged his amazement.

His face too was flushed now, with the mental stir she had set going. All his faculties were instantly mobilised in his defence. And made him only the more handsome, as a warrior, with his lighted eyes, and the defiant cock of his head.

It was clear enough now what Mrs. Branstane intended.

No emissary of the Gayland ladies was she any longer, but operating now very decidedly on her own behalf. And there was no longer mistaking of her purpose. Mischief. Pure mischief. That was it. All her talents were at its service. Penning she had proposed to herself as the next amusement after Gayland, and Landis, and Banks — and God knew what others. Just because he was difficult, perhaps.

All this in a moment or two of study, while Mrs. Branstane blew out a single saucy curl of smoke.

The sight of its cool impudence stirred Penning to a burst of the wildest ironies. This final intrusion of the

woman, into the farthest retreat he could find, in his fastidious hatred of her, revived his half-humorous toyings with the thought of murder. But there she was; in the perfect defence of her femininity; not even to be struck, or thrust from the room. There was something to terrify any man in such ingenuity. But so much had he endured of her, and it was so evident that she had infinitely more for him to endure, that he could stand off and wait, and watch its progress, and admire the fine artist touches of her technique.

"Well!" he began, to hasten matters. The suspense was unpleasant. "Truly I'm — I'm delighted to see you! This is most extraordinary good fortune. You are the one person in all Rossacre that I happened to be thinking of. And now, to see you here, in the — the *flesh*!" He laid on the irony. "Most astonishing! Tell me, to what do I owe the honour of your visit? Oh, yes, I know. You needn't tell me. Thirty years ago Ira Gayland kissed your pretty mouth — and hence your visit to me. Curious train of circumstances, isn't it! And funniest of all that it should lead to this!"

He turned, stalked to his desk, and from a drawer of it drew a handsome silver-mounted automatic revolver.

"Hence also this," he repeated, laughing lightly and fondling the weapon. "We weak members of the other sex are not, you see, without our weapons. But ah!" he broke off abruptly as he watched her. "You start! I crave your pardon. But really" — he was stepping gravely toward her — "really," — he laid a finger across the muzzle — "between this little opening and you, or anyone else in the world, is a wall, a thin wall, but impenetrable. A wall of

what? Why, of considerations. Damned, eternal considerations. Nothing more. But no possible snippet of lead could be driven through them. I couldn't even turn this thing against myself, but considerations would stand in the way. You yourself would furnish a few of them. Wouldn't you — even *you*, now, be a bit sorry if I really turned this thing upon myself — just because of you?" He drawled that ineffably. . . . "And so you see, in deference to *you* I couldn't do it. Consideration, you know!"

He laid the gun aside on the table as he talked.

"How I spout!" he laughed. "You must think me frightfully odd. And so inhospitable! I hope you mean to stay a while. Though far be it from me to impose my puny will upon yours! Consider, if you will, this poor abode as your own, to treat as you please. No; don't go. Why, you've just come. Don't go. I very much wish a good long talk with you. Don't go."

He was moving to the door. There he turned the key, and removed it, and put it in his pocket. "*Don't go*," he said as he did so, with ironic unction.

But there was no need of his caution. Mrs. Branstane was not afraid of him. Far from it. She was fascinated. Never had she seen him so handsome, in his fever of excitement. And with this grand manner that he put on expressly for her benefit! He was a new, a still more dazzling Penning to her.

Mechanically Mrs. Branstane turned in the chair and followed his movements; and drank him in, spell-bound, in a kind of cataleptic absorption. Something of emotional wildness in her, also, arose to meet his fantastic mood. This was the humour she could always understand.

She wanted to throw herself into his arms. And the lightest breath of an impulse would have sent her to it.

If Penning had suspected what was the reason of this avid interest in him, it would have moved him only to the wilder merriment. Had there been a lioness in the room — and perhaps there was — he would have tickled her nose with a straw. Dawdling back from the door, he let himself into a chair convenient to his vis-à-vis, crossed his legs, coolly flicked a spot of ash from his knee, rested his arms on the arms of the chair, touched the tips of his fingers together, and began to talk.

Talked as he had often talked to a jury, but never before to an individual.

"Madam," he began, "I was pondering a very deep subject when you came on this — this thoughtful visit. I was pondering the subject of ultimates. You know of course what I mean? You are yourself an ultimate. That too" — he pointed to the revolver on the table — "is an ultimate. I've wondered of late whether it could accomplish anything to help me. You see, I find myself in the predicament of so many men. After all I am only finite. Nature has made such ridiculous mistakes! Why should man be finite? At any rate, bother the other poor devils! why should *I* have to be finite? I've searched in vain for a satisfactory answer to that. Woman alone is infinite — in her powers of creating disturbance. But fie on me, for a poor reflection on your sex."

Inwardly Mrs. Branstane was exulting, "It's Annabel he means!" Yet he was so handsome that it seemed a pity to interrupt him, even with assurances of her complete understanding. Besides, it

might spoil this unusual compliment of his willingness to talk at last — and to her!

"Yes," he was jabbering on with his ironies, "I find that man is finite. Every man is walled in by other men's desires. We prowling about our little pens like flies on a pane of glass, stupidly trying to find a way out — when there is none. That little silver thing on the table there has helped a few men out of their pens. But I find that it won't fit the lock on mine.

"You see, madam" — he leaned forward on the arms of the chair, as if expounding something precious to a favoured pupil — "I've just about made a failure of it here. If it isn't total yet, it's coming. That's what people think. I've heard them say so. But I've done worse. I've made an ass of myself. And you'll have to admit that such a thing is fatal. I'm a 'disappointment.' They all say so here. Yet if I put a snippet of lead in my noddle, I simply confess to these fools that they are right about it. And damn them, I don't intend to give 'em the satisfaction.

"*But*, you will say, why employ lead? Why not employ a railroad ticket? What so simple as flying away from here? And starting afresh somewhere else? Ah! I have the misfortune of a memory. Wherever I went I should have to remember the incident of my failure here — failure to down a difficulty. As you know, a difficulty in life is a challenge. And one of the painful consequences of being a man is to be sensitive on the point of running away from a challenge. No, a man who does that cannot live on."

There Penning rose, and began drumming his chest with a fist, as if to hammer out his thoughts the more candidly.

"No," he was saying with settled conviction, but more to himself, "it was up to me to meet you. And smash you, and knock you out of the way. Somehow. . . . Ah, yes!" he returned from his abstraction and smiled down at the woman before him, "but how? . . . Murder? Murder has its uses. But it is commonly thought to be impolite. There are always these damned considerations in the way of murder, you know? And so I find you fixed more firmly than ever across my path. Here you are, very decidedly in this room. We're having a cordial, pleasant chat together. I hope you are enjoying it. I can't, unfortunately, because I'm too envious of you. I envy you your easy skill in getting out of your 'pen.' Some years ago, I believe you said, you grew fond of one Ira Gayland — and he up and married someone else. That was your pen. But you broke through the vile confines. Haven't you told me yourself that you lightly tossed Ira Gayland into the bughouse?"

"That brings us to another odd feature." Penning had taken to moving up and down before her with his hands on his hips, as he was wont to do before a jury. "Some of us are hard — some of us are so inconveniently soft. I happen to be of the soft persuasion. Murder comes hard to me. Now, for you, life must be simple. For you there is only one side to a question. That side is always your side. When you want anything, what so easy as to go out and get it! You can ignore these damned considerations. I myself see well enough what I want; but I have to notice the obstacles in the way. For instance I can admit that you have a legitimate right to existence. That's the obstacle in the way of my

knocking you off the world. The one thing that I *can't* see is what you want of me. I don't know why you are here. My ruin begins to look fairly complete now, as it is. For the life of me I can't see what more you can do. But don't you think —"

He stepped closer to Mrs. Branstane, and bent down politely as he finished,

"Don't you think that I'm reconciled just yet to this situation. I may still find a way out, in spite of you."

And Mrs. Branstane burst into laughter — delighted laughter.

This marvellous man! This eloquent, speaking doll! For this brilliant intellect, as she thought it, to reason its way so close to the mystery of her blocking his way, and never guess it!

So his elaborate and eloquent simplicity only made him the more dazzling to her. It gave her a superiority over him touching the maternal. Dazzling as he was, she was larger than he. Something that he couldn't "fathom," she knew perfectly. At her sweet will he was doing this dancing. And the sight of him, spouting there, in her power, so nearly overcame the lingering remnants of womanliness in her that she all but rushed upon him and threw herself at his feet in full confession.

Only the fear of appearing grotesque, of creating an instinctive revulsion in the male, restrained her.

And for a moment Penning himself restrained her.

Noting that she was staring at him wistfully, he threw himself into as faithful a copy as he could muster of her own manner and said in a mocking falsetto,

"Oh, I know what I am! And I know who *made*

me what I am! Oh, it is terrible to be what I so loathe to be — terrible to feel the suffering those Gaylands have inflicted — terrible to be judged for being as warped as they've made me! Lord, that touched me once!" He laughed down at her. "Another thing to envy you for. I wish *I* had the same easy way of excusing my faults. Blaming them on the Gaylands! . . . Here!" he ended suddenly.

In one waistcoat pocket he found his watch, in another he fumbled for the key to his door.

"Here! It's just five-thirty. Some of them will be down there still." He went to the door and swung it wide. "Waste no time, Mrs. Branstane. Think what *society*" — with infinite unction he repeated the word — "think what *society* would think of you if it knew you were here! Now hurry out and down the stairs, there's a dear."

Slowly Mrs. Branstane rose and obeyed him. But first she stepped close to him as he stood by the door. Her visit, it happened, was a bit the more brief than she had intended. And without satisfactory results.

Looking Penning squarely in the eye, though it cost her a deeper flush of the cheek to speak it, she said,

"There *is* a way out of your 'pen,' Mr. Penning. Some day you may be clever enough to find it. Especially as it's plain as the nose on your face."

And she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him — kissed him frantically. And hurried down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN he had closed the door the highly imaginative Penning fell back again into his chair by the window and burst into apoplectic laughter.

This once he had got rid of her. How often again would he be so fortunate? Nice outlook for a Judge!

In short of an hour he started again, at a knock on his door. But this time the sight of two men relieved him.

Penning, it fell by chance, was not the only animated speaker in the Club that afternoon. Closeted behind locked doors, a committee of six political powers in the Club membership had gathered in discussion of the likeliest Republican for the approaching Congressional nomination. All the afternoon they had been closeted. Luncheon was served to them there. Six o'clock had struck. But no decision.

Naturally Penning's name had come up for discussion — Banks had seen to that. And a gale of laughter had followed its mention. It was pretty fair token of Penning's standing then that Senator Banks had forfeited what small remnant of political prestige was left after his financial downfall, by his obstinate advocacy of the cause of Penning.

"I tell you, the man has taken to drugs!" a man named Padgett pronounced. "I hear that everywhere. And I believe it. It's the kindest thing to say of him. It's all clear enough. The women went

crazy over him and turned his head. Licked up a great reputation for him. Now he's got to *show* something. So he takes to dope to keep himself going. It's all clear enough."

"Yes, Padgett," the Senator mused. "I believe Penning beat you in every case you ever fought against him. Am I right?"

Five of the six men who heard that roared in enjoyment of the stroke. And so the Senator kept alive the fiction of a still reliable Penning. Finally he thought of a pertinent story.

The narrative had to do with a Farmer Jackson, of Plunkett township, who had once raised three blooded shoats, thinking to take a prize with one of them at the L—— County Fair. On a certain day one of these three shoats wriggled out of the sty and into a young cornfield, and Jackson, happening to be lone-handed at the time, spent the whole morning in an effort to chase his shoat out of the field. The soil was wet and soft, and the going poor, and Jackson, slipping and sliding in mad career, got himself pretty well daubed, while his wife and daughter sat on the fence and enjoyed the spectacle.

That so offended Jackson against the shoat that he shut the beast in a pen by himself, and concentrated all his affections and his swill on the other two. But the lone shoat, misunderstood though he was, was not to be easily discouraged, and he refused to succumb to Jackson's snubs. Do what his owner might with the other two, the lone shoat, consistent with his force of character, shifted for himself and remained the sleekest of the three. That rather widened the breach between the shoat and Jackson. At last, in the wisdom of anger, the farmer sold the peculiar animal

to his neighbour Carr and took his own remaining pair to the Fair. And the remainder of the homely history was that Carr and the incomprehensible shoat took the prize.

The conference thought it saw the Senator's point, and he promptly reinforced their gathering endorsement. He remembered Penning's rapscaillion brother in California, and alleged he knew not what crimes had been done to fret Penning's mind to the detriment of his work and his health. And in the end he got himself appointed one of a committee of two to call upon Penning forthwith and urge him to brace, for the good of the Republican cause and the general salvation of the Republic. To insure a fair decision the hostile Padgett was made the other member of the committee.

Hence the knock on Penning's door.

"Did I really hear that?" he mumbled. "*Or am* I beginning to 'hear' things?"

The knock was repeated.

And in a moment Senator Banks, followed by Arthur Padgett, was admitted to the now failing light of Penning's rooms. At the turn of an electric switch, their host soon had them all standing to each other in a better light.

"Penning!" the Senator said, in his best oratorical manner, "you are the hope of the Republican party in this district!"

There was a pause.

"I beg pardon?" said Penning.

Padgett laughed — and brought an instant angry flush to Penning's face.

"I say," Banks obligingly repeated, still out of breath from his long climb up the stairs, "you are

the hope of the Republican party for the Congressional nomination this Fall. Padgett and myself have been appointed a committee to inform you. And believe me, Penning," the Senator finished, "I speak now not as a friend, but as a Republican."

Penning smiled at the unconscious epigram. Then he said,

"Gentlemen, can either of you tell me, is there any taste in the white of an egg?"

A pause.

"I — I beg pardon?" said Banks.

The Senator glanced at Padgett, and Padgett leered back.

As Penning marked the insinuation, he walked up to Padgett and tapped the top button of his coat. "Tell me, have you seen the famous dingmaul that is ravaging L—— County?"

Padgett tittered, and Banks was terror-stricken.

Noting the state of their emotions, Penning undertook to enlarge upon it. "Be seated, I beg of you." He bowed. "I've seen the dingmaul, if you please. Had it with me, right here in this room, not an hour ago. A soft animal. Very sleek. But its claws are devilish sharp."

"You see?" Padgett whispered audibly to Banks. "Didn't I tell you?"

"I don't know what you may have told my friend the Senator," Penning caught him up. And stepping to a point directly in front of Padgett's chair, he said, "But this is what I tell *you*. I asked you if you had seen the dingmaul. That delicate allusion was blunted against your perceptions. It doesn't occur to you that a man may have interests and problems that are private to himself, and not to be advertised to

others. It happens that certain concerns of mine do not coincide at present with the best interests of the Republican party." Turning to Banks, he added, "I say that to you too, my dear Senator."

Turning back to Padgett, — "To you, my little fellow, let me say that your proffer of favours comes a trifle late. I have seen what you think of me, but I have not forgotten the five thousand dollars you once got by a clever trick out of Senator Banks — though this is the first moment he has heard of it. I'm ashamed of myself for sparing you, Padgett, so long. Professional ethics, again! Pay him the money to-morrow. If you don't I shall bring action to disbar you. And now, from the colour of your cheeks, I should say you have some respect still for my powers of mind. Let me bid you good evening. You, I mean, Padgett. Not Senator Banks."

As Padgett passed out, with what dignity he could, Penning ironically waved after him every imaginary trace of the atmosphere poisoned by the visitor.

Returning to the Senator, he found that "Have a chair" was the uttermost he could find to say at the moment.

Banks, used to the ancient tropical relationship between them, went whiter than ever. He stood there so mournful and anguished, and yet so obviously steeled not to break and run, that Penning burst into bitter laughter as he surveyed his friend. The laughter died quickly, however, as Penning's eye travelled over the figure of Banks — his clothes more worn than ever, the thighs of his trousers so thin and shiny, the cuffs of his coat so near to being frayed.

"What's on your mind, Banks?" he asked of his silent accuser.

"That 's — that 's precisely what I came here to ask you!" the Senator blurted.

All through their long attachment the simpler Banks had been frequently puzzled as Penning retired into moods that baffled him; but always the Senator had waited patiently, at the door of them, till Penning emerged again. Always he had frankly acknowledged in Penning a mind infinitely more complicated than his own — and loved him the more on account of it.

Now, though, he was immeasurably hurt, in feeling so permanently locked out from this newest, and longest, and strangest humour. The old intimacy so stubbornly refused to renew itself.

Could it be true that Penning had really gone to pieces, as people said?

Even Penning started at the earnestness in Banks's tone, as the little man asked again, "Penning, for *God's* sake, as man to man, as friend to friend, what 's the matter!"

Even after that, Penning, for such was his perverseness, his utter soreness, could only yawn, as his contribution to a better understanding. What ailed him was too large a topic for his jaded spirits then.

Still, he repented and tried to be human. "Aren't *you* working too hard, Banks?" He was going to be content with what intimation the Senator could draw from that hint. "How 's the laundry going?"

"Oh, splendid, splendid! In a few months I'll have it on its feet. It's a *fine* little business, and I'm going to make the most of it."

"But don't work yourself to death, old man."

"'Old man'! I'm a *young* man of fifty-two, just making a start in the world. Thank God for past experience, say I! It's going to shoot me along like

a streak. But, now, really, Penning, how about you? What the *hell's* the matter! It isn't because you can't swing any job in the country that you're — you're —" Hastily the Senator backed away from a faux pas — only to back into another. "I said to Claverson just the other day, 'Why, the Judgeship is the merest peccadillo to a man like Penning!'"

Penning roared at Banks's verbal contortion. "Oh," he said between gasps of laughter, "of course you mustn't expect a Michael Angelo to lay bricks!"

"No, sir!" the Senator assented. "It's fiddling work for you. 'Why, sir,' I said to Claverson," the Senator hastened to correct himself, "I said, 'I'll have that man Governor of this State in two years more!'"

"I only hope, Banks, that I'm present when you make me Governor."

"Why, where else will you be!"

"That — that puzzles even me."

With that the Senator lost all patience. Being an older man, the ready recourse to the paddle logically occurred to him. And he got up and began to pace up and down the room, shaking his head and his finger in unison, as he applied the spanking.

"See here, young man!" it began. And the harangue was as long as it was severe—and kindly.

"Very interesting indeed!" Penning said, when it was finished. "In answer to that I've got just one thing to say. I refuse the Congressional nomination, *out of charity to the Republican party*. In view of what I know is going to befall me in the near future, I couldn't be elected to the poorhouse. It's kind of you, Banks. But don't waste your time and effort on me. You need all that for your business. By the

way, how would you like me as a partner? I may need some such job as that before long." . . .

When the Senator was gone, Penning this time locked his door securely. He had wanted that Congressional nomination. But the utter futility of running, with ineluctable scandal at hand!

Another wanted thing snatched away from him!

CHAPTER XIV

ON the next afternoon Judge Penning cleared his desk in Court's Chambers. After some fashion he had laboured through the term of Equity Court that followed the June criminal session, patient, but grim. Now it was verging upon July. The heat was torrid. Other officers of the County sat about their offices, under electric fans, and chiefly idle, except for the occupation of smoking. Even the criminal himself takes a vacation at such times, and the sheriff has nothing to do. The lawyers were all bent upon summer tours. And except for Judge Penning himself, Court's Chambers were untenanted. This afternoon even Penning was reaching for his hat, with another soothing tramp over the hills in view, when Mrs. Branstane entered.

In busier seasons her calls had gone unnoticed. A good many of the Judge's hearings were open to the public, and it was nothing to see women, or one woman, present — anxiously serving the appetite for civic usefulness, perhaps.

But at such a time as this the visit of any one woman to Court's Chambers was bound to be observed by the other officials in the court house and excite remark.

This fact was instantly in Penning's mind, at the moment he saw her. She had calculated just that.

Hence the brevity of his greeting.

He said, "Get out!"

Since the worst was coming anyway, it mattered little how he conducted himself, and he chose to fight.

Instant anger provided Mrs. Branstane with instant resolution, however. "So?" she said, with surpassing sweetness, and came boldly into the room and selected a chair near the Judge's desk. "I'm not the cholera, you know."

Yet, angry though she was, she was not going to be stampeded into any hot and defeating burst of language.

She was there to take immediate advantage of her progress, to reinforce the impression she felt she had made on the afternoon before in Penning's rooms at the Club—even though her visit then had not produced quite the hoped-for results.

Penning ostentatiously rose and put on his hat. And dread that he might walk out and leave her spurred Mrs. Branstane to say hurriedly, "I want your help, Mr. Penning. For myself, this time."

Penning laughed outright. "And you'll take it from me at the point of the pistol, if necessary!"

The instant he had spoken, Penning regretted it. He had stopped long enough to bandy words with her again.

"Oh, I see you don't like me, Mr. Penning—not yet. It's because we don't understand each other."

"But have we any *desire* to understand each other!" he cut in. "I'm in on that, you know!"

"Won't you help me?"

Mrs. Branstane this time made that an impassioned outcry. Hurriedly, desperately she waded on, against the flood of his irritation. "Really I—I have only the kindest feelings toward you. Funny, isn't it, the

way we get tangled up, every time I come. It always sets us to hammering each other, doesn't it?"

"Then for God's sake, why come?"

Still Mrs. Branstane resolved to control herself; still she would melt him. "Oh, *please* don't be angry with me. I'm sorry — *so* sorry, Mr. Penning, that you've formed such a wrong impression of me. I want you to *like* me. And oughtn't we — as long as we are to be associated together — oughtn't we to understand each other better?"

"How do you know we're going to be 'associated together'!"

"Because I have a pretty firm suspicion that we are, Mr. Penning!" Mrs. Branstane burst out, but instantly closed her erring lips with her hand. "Ah," she ventured on, in the old tone of entreaty, "where is your boasted kindness and sympathy, if you will not understand me! Oh —"

"Oh, bosh!"

"Aha-a-a!"

The inflammable one had caught fire at last. With hands upraised Mrs. Branstane rose and started toward him, in the rage of defeat.

"I thought so!" Penning laughed, though he could scarcely speak for his ungovernable loathing. He himself stepped round from his desk to meet Mrs. Branstane, white with anger, his fists clenched, his whole person trembling with rage.

"See here!" he gasped, he exploded. "I've got about \$96,000. I counted it up the other day. It's all I've got after giving something to Senator Banks. It isn't much. I'm only moderately clever at investments. It's all I've made in these dozen years here. But I give you my word I'm not withholding

a cent. Take it, if that's what you're after. Let's save time. Take it, and get out. How about it? You go, or I go. It makes no difference which. But you take the coin, and I begin all over again. What do you say? I can't think of anything else you're after."

He spoke in passion. But the moment the words were spoken — spoken to that particular hearer — Penning had instant reason to writhe in regret at the enormity of his slip.

"H'm! Another insult!" Mrs. Branstane pronounced, herself now white with anger. "And the worst insult yet!" Then the weapon of a cruel thought occurred to her. "I will say, though, Mr. Penning — *Judge* Penning — that you are handsome in your bribes."

Penning clapped his hands to his head. "My God!" he laughed bitterly, "I forgot I'm a Judge!"

It was out, then. That was how she meant to regard Penning's offer of a parting.

"I guess people about here had better know a little something of that," he heard Mrs. Branstane saying. "A Judge that bribes! H'm!"

Penning had started for the door, laughing wildly.

"This is what I might have expected of you, Mrs. Branstane!" he snapped at her in passing. "I might have seen you from the first as just an irresponsible trouble-maker. But I will say" — the habit of irony was not so completely swept away in anger but he could make her a profound obeisance at the door — "I will say, you have a positive genius for the profession!"

In wild haste, her arms outstretched toward him, Mrs. Branstane followed him. "Oh, I don't mean

that! You can't *possibly* think I mean what I say! I *never* mean it, I *never* mean it!"

But he was gone. Gone with the distinguished appearance, the rugged face, the elegant manner, gone with all the components that formed for Mrs. Branstane the most desirable thing in the world.

On reaching his apartments at the Club, Penning astonished his favourite servant, old Parker, with three demands on the Scotch and soda, in rapid succession, and on a hot afternoon. The old fellow was not the more at his ease, either, on marking the Judge's preparations for leaving the Club, dressed for a walk, at the very moment when he should have been seated for dinner — and in the face of a threatened thunder-storm.

In point of truth the imminent shower was the very reason of the Judge's determination on a walk without his dinner. Inclined toward another long stroll, he had looked out of his windows and noted the promise of an evening, and perhaps a night, of rain and thunder.

By heavens, it was the last straw! Not even a simple walk might he take, it appeared, without the extreme of opposition!

Very good. The walk he would take, notwithstanding. And if only to accentuate his contempt of the elements, he would go more than half way to meet them. He set out at once, trusting to a dinner along the way — if he felt jolly well disposed toward it. Let hell itself, if it pleased, yawn in his way!

With a light raincoat over his arm he struck out up the Avenue. At Bayard Street, just before reaching the Gayland house, he turned toward the river,

crossed the Bayard Street bridge, and swung into the River Drive.

And precisely as the clouds had promised, the rains descended, the floods came, the lightnings spitefully spat upon earth, the trees writhed and whined, and thunder rocked the world. It was a good, honest, roaring, old-school holocaust, even for that valley, specially designed as it is by Nature with all the atmospheric ingredients for thundergusts that rival anything in the tropics of fact or fiction. Deep in that bowl among the hills gather vapours that loiter, and accumulate tons of moisture, and electrical energy. When they are gorged with power they pelt the patient farmer's crops with hail, and strike down his cattle with their wanton bolts. Not a summer goes by but some field has ripped from its bosom a patriarchal chestnut or oak. On any night in July good Rossacrats, rocking away on their piazzas, may see on the horizon the red glare of some poor man's barn burning. Disciplined by long acquaintance of these rough sports with him, your good Rossacrat promptly rises from his bed, no matter what the hour, at sound of the first bolt; and dresses, ready to leave his house on the instant, never sure what second will bring the next shot of wild marksmanship to his own roof.

Though it was but seven o'clock as Penning strode on now, mounting the path that, in calm weather, leads lovers up the mountain to an elevating view over valley and river, the evening was as black as midnight. The wind was a sustained shriek in his ears as he leaned against it. And he revelled in its call to his energies. It provided him grateful work for his nerves. His face felt as if pelted by shot from

a gun, such was the steady discharge of the rain against it. The roadway was littered with the branches of trees, newly wrenched from their places on the boughs above. Often, poised on one foot, in the act of stepping over these fallen obstructions, the blast would tilt Penning backward. Even in the spaces of smooth walking he was obliged to hurl himself against the whistling wind, as if it were an adamant wall that was bent upon pressing him down.

Certainly it was not the poorest of summer's efforts in that pretty vale.

Whatever it was, it perfectly suited Penning. In this uproar he was blissfully at home. Far down in him, in the depths where every real man is a bit of a mountebank, and has the actor's instinct to round out his life as a finished picture, Penning knew that he was living up to the tragic heights of his sombre destiny!

In reality he was indulging in a rather imaginative form of swearing.

Nevertheless he was happy in his fling. Now and again he would pause and gaze off over the valley, as some region in its geography would suddenly stand out of the blackness in the brilliant ephemeral glare of a flash from the sky — a second's view of a wildly tossing bit of woodland on the distant hills, or a strip of yellow grain-field, its tall ripe stalks swept into waves as if of golden water, cringing before the onslaught of wind and water. Like freakish giant searchlights the bolts ranged over the town and picked out familiar steeples and buildings, hazy and dim behind the intervening veil of the rain.

Occasionally the mad walker caught the nervous sob of a bell, rocked in its tower by the wind, its

broken peal bandied along on the wanton and frolicsome gusts of the wind. At times the tumbled glory of the scene took Penning quite out of himself. At times the world persisted in being larger than himself. Once he sat down on a fallen milestone and wasted some moments of valuable exertion in cheerful enchantment before the wonderful spectacle. Yet always he recovered and whipped himself back into his whim of devilish abandon.

He danced, he leaped, he yelled, he sang snatches of ribald song, such was the physical relief of confronting these wild elements and defying their dangers. Here was freedom. One spot at least where that noisome woman need not be expected.

Once, fairly well along the mountain path, at an opening in the shrubbery, a wonderful cluster of flashes, as if in deliberate unison, lighted the whole valley in its flare. And roaring with laughter Penning shook his fist at the little metropolis popping at him thus impudently out of the night.

There lay it, and his life in it for twelve years, epitomised in a flash of lightning. And he laughed his scorn of the place.

What had it done for him, in return for his honest endeavours! Given him the material reward of \$96,000, every cent of it tainted with pettiness. Anything it offered above dollars was likewise so tainted that decent beings must toss it aside in scorn. The State Senatorship to Banks. The Judgeship to Gayland. Even when he had made bold to love, the town had ready its Sherry Brookes, with a claim that no decent man could ignore. Meanwhile honest men ruined, like Banks. Scoundrels like Landis succeeding as they pleased. For himself, Mrs. Bran-

stane finally. In all his twelve years in Rossacre, what had he got from it but such a loathing on such a night! In that one flash of lightning the whole town and all that it represented stood out for what it was worth.

"Ah, ha!" Penning shouted to it, and made passes with his fists. "Look at the little hole! The little sty! Forty thousand snouts snorting and sucking at the trough! To the biggest hog the biggest share! To hell with a soul above swill!" And he sank back on the log again, weak from laughter.

Almost at once to be shocked when he felt, in the palm of a hand dangling at his side, the cool snout of some animal nuzzling there. Instinctively striking out in the dark, he struck a wet and furry object that emitted a yelp. Stooping down he picked up a small dog, lost in the storm and lured to some human thing by the sound of Penning's voice. Whimpering, frightened, the poor beast was happy enough to have been found.

"As I live!" Penning roared. "Well! Here we have the ideal Judge of L—— County! Only see how he cringes and whines! This mind would suit the views of the dear people!" He stroked the spaniel's wet coat, and a new absurdity occurred to him. Looking up to the raining sky he commanded, "Hey, up there! Strike a light, will you! . . . Well! You're a long time about it. We'll see what this —"

There came the expected flash and roar, and the timid dog leaped closer and lapped gratitude over Penning's face.

"Ah! A sympathetic Judge! And therefore a just Judge! I might even tell him the sad story of my life. But no; that's too much to inflict upon a dog!"

For a space he coddled the luckless but ineffably happy beast; and then went on with his bitter whims.

"We have, you know, an odd saying, 'Lucky dog!' Never before now have I realised the force of that. You poor, snivelling lord of creation! *You* never reached the end of your interests before reaching the end of your days! I'm in that fix right now. I'm like the gentle, insouciant cow, that has suddenly waked up to the fact that in all the grand scheme of creation she is only a cow. You know, my friend, a few months ago I was getting on nicely enough in the little sty down there. I was earning something to eat, and a few of those indulgences without which pampered man feels he cannot exist. I refer to the honour of his fellow-men; their votes for office; and the opportunity of being criticised by them all. What more could one ask, you will say? But, all of a sudden, it stopped. God, it's a funny tale. You're enjoying it, I see. Here am I, what is commonly regarded as a strong man. When all of a sudden appears before me a po-or, lo-one woman; and just like that" — Penning snapped his fingers in the dog's face — "it's gone! Just like that! . . . She appeared. And that's all I know. Nothing for me to do. Nothing much about her, except that she's a woman. Do I admire her? I have no feeling for the lady that is feeble enough to be called an aversion. But what, I ask you, as a competent judge of humanity, is why the devil I, of all the forty thousand down there, had to be singled out for that foul fiend's unholy attentions? I say it is strange. All I can do is damn everything over an inch-and-a-half high. And wouldn't you swear, too, my friend, if —"

Penning stopped to listen to something.

"Wouldn't you —"

He stopped again.

From far down the mountain-side came a cry. Something like, "Hallo-o-o!"

"As I live!" Penning said to the dog on his lap, now cuddled down and wriggling in contentment. "My stars! See! Someone is looking for you — on a night like this! A dog may be missed — but not I!"

He listened again. The roar of the storm continued. Yet again came that long-drawn "Hallo-o-o!"

"Dog!" Penning owned, "perhaps I have been too familiar with you. I see you are of some importance in the world. The command shall be obeyed. I'll see you home. Evidently it's down that way, somewhere."

And tucking the animal under his arm, Penning began slipping and sliding down the black and muddy path he had just laboriously ascended. "To be hunted on a night like this!" he marvelled. "Just when I thought I was something of a pup myself!"

"Hallo-o-o!" came again. The creator of the cry seemed to choose lulls in the storm, in order to be sure that he was heard. Yet still the wind played weird tricks with the sound. Snatched the two syllables from the lips that framed them, and drawled them and quavered them, till they became, like the bells, a frolic expression of the night.

"O-oh, yes!" Penning answered its impatience, in ironic imitation of the tone. "Go to blazes! We're coming, as fast as we can! See how they want you!" he said to the dog. Even shook his whimpering burden. "Damn you, and damn your dog's luck!"

"Hallo-o-o!" they heard again, a bit nearer.

"Wait!" Penning stopped. "Was that a woman's voice, or a man's?"

"Well!" he started on. "Maybe it's a *man* who is lost. Poor devil, on such a rotten night! Maybe it's someone *calling* for help, and not giving it. We must fly! They're scared, too. Hear that? Ye-es, coming!" he answered with all his might. And down the path he stumbled on.

What was Penning's shock when, the two answering cries having traced each other to a meeting, he came upon his friend Banks, driving a rickety old wagon he had hired along the familiar way, having first hired old Parker at the Club, who exercised his lungs at intervals with his long "Hallo-o-o!"

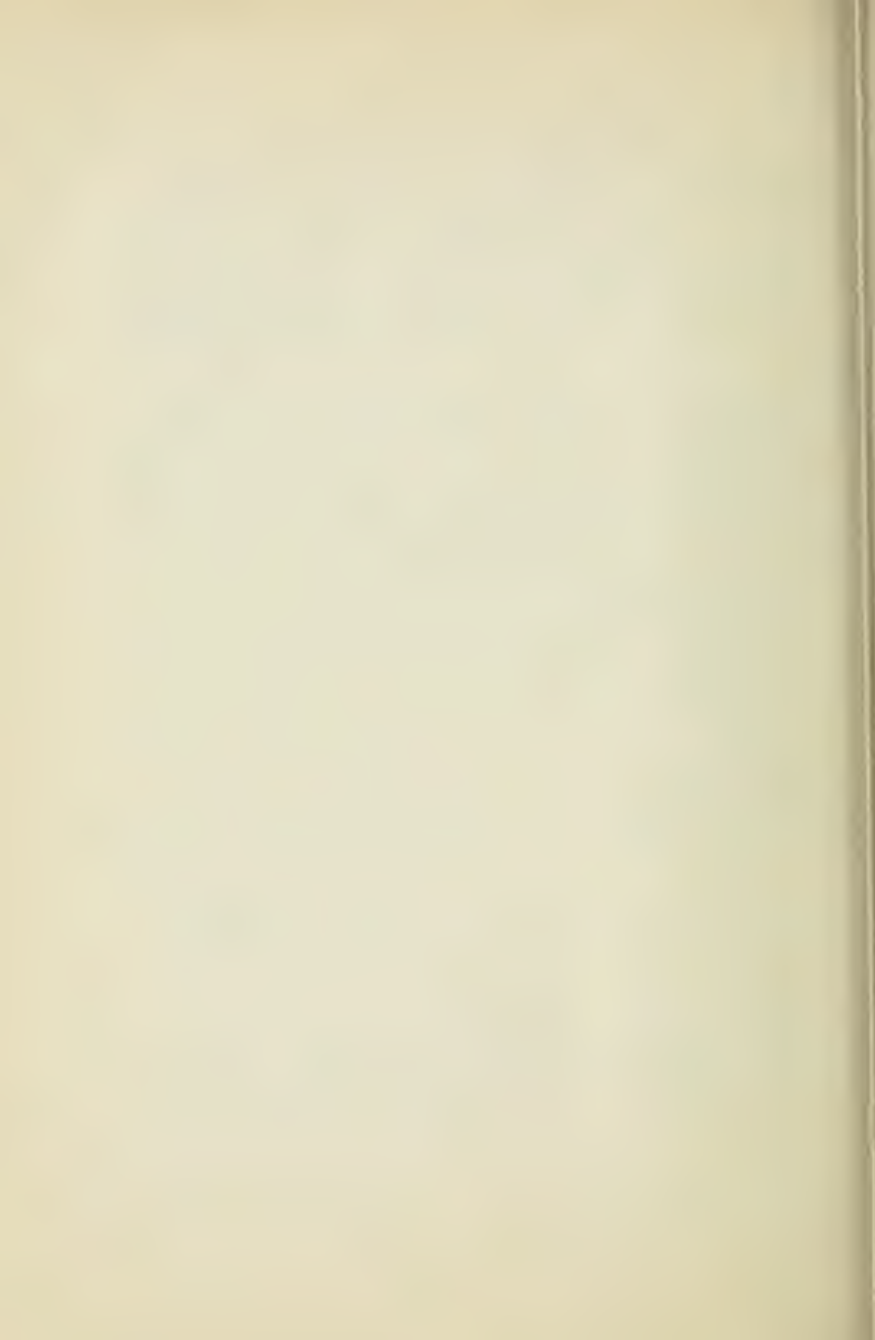
Openly and without embarrassment the Senator wept at the luck of having found him. Plainly Penning was ill, but he was alive and safe. He muttered incomprehensible things about "dogs," and "pigs," and an "honest man." He was found, nevertheless. And they hauled him home, and put him to bed.

For two days he was down with a frightful cold, and a fever, and Lord knew what worse things to come. On the third day they bundled him away into the country for a rest.

On the fourth day, his worst, the Judge was candidly delirious, and spouted much of some mysterious "Woman."

"Thank heaven!" said Senator Banks, when he heard that — for all the time he had faithfully stayed by. "It's only a woman! When all along I thought it was something serious!"

BOOK FOUR



CHAPTER I

FOR a fortnight Penning lay sequestered "somewhere in the country," at a farm selected by Senator Banks. Sedulously the Senator spread the report that Penning lay ill with a bad case of poisoning — for "poisoned by a personality" Penning had phrased it. And with this amiable cock-and-bull fiction the Senator might have prevailed over gossip, but that he was himself immediately stricken down with something of a cold, resulting from his own exposure on that night of rescue.

But Lord, how the town did gossip, nevertheless!

"That man Penning *poisoned*?" old Bill Morton the grocer sneered in fine scorn to a customer in his store. "It's plain as the nose on your face what's the matter with him! I've allus said he had a loud cackle, but he laid no eggs. Now he knows we're all onto him and he's poisoned with dope. That's what's the matter with your friend Penning!"

In the Club nothing was talked of but Penning's mysterious case. But there Lacy's theory was the more generally accepted. "Woman, gentlemen; Woman!" And he kissed his fingers to the ceiling. "Something wrong with his love-affairs, that's all. He's the sort to take such things to heart. Only a few of us left, gentlemen!"

"But who can it be! Our friend 'Mrs. Brimstone'?"

"Pooh! She's scarcely his sort." . . .

At length the unhappy estate of Penning registered itself on the consciousness of Mrs. Gayland herself.

"For shame, my daughter!" she complained to Annabel. "Fie on you and your silly pride! What if he *hasn't* been near you for a month. You ought to write to him and tell him how sorry you are. . . . And if you don't write to him, I'll attend to it myself."

"Mother!" And Annabel blushed for her parent.

This, moreover, was spoken in the presence of Mrs. Branstane.

So people gossiped and marvelled about Penning. But Mrs. Branstane knew, and knowing, was contented. If the poor idiot was going to shy in that fashion at his best interests, let him rant and riot as he pleased!

Really the rioting and the gossip intoxicated Mrs. Branstane. They were the measure of her power. The whole town seemed to answer to her lightest touch. Everywhere Mrs. Branstane could note effects large and small from her presence in the town — from the towering turmoil of Judge Penning to the small circumstance that Annabel Gayland confessed to a sleep some hours shorter than the normal each night. Why shouldn't Mrs. Branstane prowl about the Gayland mansion now with a satisfied smile!

Still, she wasn't getting forward with Penning. . . .

Perhaps it was such misgivings that accounted for the mixed mosaic of her moods now toward the Gayland ladies. So long as there was the ghost of a chance of Mrs. Branstane's landing Judge Penning for herself, she was disposed to be decent to his friends. Still, sometimes, in her rising nervousness, she lost patience even with the angelic Annabel. But chiefly it was Annabel's mother who annoyed her. The simple Mrs. Gayland could never live down

a lingering sense of proprietorship in the Gayland house and its contents.

One day, at luncheon, when Annabel was a guest somewhere else, and occasion was favourable to candour, Mrs. Branstane observed,

"By the way!" Looking toward the sideboard Mrs. Branstane had noticed the absence of Judge Gayland's handsome silver punch-bowl, and her suspicions were aroused at once. "Where is that thing?" She pointed to the vacant place. "I haven't seen it for two days."

"E-eh," Mrs. Gayland sighed, "we drank away all our good luck in that wretched bowl. God has punished us for that."

"Yes, I know. But what have you done with it?"

"E-eh, I gave it to God."

"Gave it to God'!" Mrs. Branstane laughed outright at Mrs. Gayland's bovine solemnity. "What do you mean by that?"

"O-oh," Mrs. Gayland sighed further, "if only I had broken it up long ago! Maybe we'd have had better luck. I had no money for my missionary dues so I gave them that. It seemed like a penance for its many, many sins."

That was enough for Mrs. Branstane. To atone-ment on any such scale of magnificence she determined to put a prompt quietus. So long as Mrs. Gayland chose to mortify the flesh by hiding away her best napery and china, Mrs. Branstane could countenance the thrift. But this high-handed disposal of the punch-bowl was not to be dismissed without a rebuke.

Poor Mrs. Gayland was at once in a lachrymose condition. "Why, Nellie! I hope I haven't offended you, have I?"

Without Penning there was no future for Mrs. Gayland. Nobody to repair the house, and straighten the leaning gateposts. Till Penning could be won back she felt obliged to keep Mrs. Branstane in good humour whatever the cost. "I do hope I haven't offended you!" she repeated. "I'm sure I never meant to."

"Mother!" And the two women started as Annabel entered the dining-room in time to hear the end of the colloquy. They both looked at her in amazement, in answer to the strange new tone in the girl's voice.

That day Mrs. Branstane had more misgivings.

"Mother," Annabel said, when they were at last alone, "I have a note from Mr. Penning. I've asked him to let me take him for a drive. And he'll come to-morrow." . . .

That it was time to leave his rural retreat and face the town Penning had now fully sensed. The quality of gossip that was afloat about him he could readily guess; and in hiding away any longer he knew he was only deepening the mystery and justifying the chatter. Still he had the sensation, as he returned to town, that he was rather going to his doom.

The quality of Mrs. Branstane's revenge he could easily imagine, if he declined to treat with her except with the most skilful diplomacy.

Nevertheless, and though ashamed of his babyish tantrum, he returned to town with his head in the air, and with nothing but ironically jocose replies to the inquirers at the Club, with their insinuating curiosity.

"Now, what can you make of a fellow like that!" was the current comment among them.

Duly Penning arrayed himself next day in his best

sporting attire — in a bold shepherd's plaid, with a scarf like an August sunset, a broad Leghorn hat with a fine lyrical sweep to its brim, a pair of canary-coloured gloves — though it was late July, and in Rossacre! — and, to crown all, a Malacca stick. All this he let Rossacre have straight in the eye, and be hanged. Thus he set out up the Avenue to meet his appointment for a drive with Miss Annabel.

Halted at a crossing, while a funeral passed, the Judge came within range of a band of labourers engaged in digging of a sewer, and overheard a half-whispered conversation.

"And who is thot, now, Jake?" one of them said.

"Thot? Wot! That felly in the circus outfit? That's the gre-eat Andy Penning, Mr. Berrigan. I'm s'prised you don't know the gent!"

"Is it possible! Is thot the Hon. Andy! Well! Thot felly ought to be ho-ome at his mother's breast!"

"Fine pair of legs he's got, eh? Get on to 'em, will ye?"

"Maybe so. But they ain't long enough to run for office no more in these parts, sez I! Not from wot I've hearn."

In the titter following upon this touch of wit the subject of these remarks passed beyond hearing and pursued his way.

The Gayland ladies, when Penning reached their abode, were engaged in unanimous embroidery in the summer house, a latticed pavilion in the little grove of apples and peaches in the garden behind the mansion. They waved their handkerchiefs in unanimous salute as he strode along the driveway, under the porte-cochère, and followed his course to their court, and bowed his respects.

"Ladies!" He swept them his profoundest obeisance. And for all his pallor he presented a handsome appearance. For a brief space they chattered. That is to say, Mrs. Gayland and Penning did. Somehow Miss Annabel only smiled at him shyly, when his eye turned to hers.

Mrs. Branstane? — Mrs. Branstane chose to remain rather in the background, fearing to trust herself before the other women.

So, at last, it came time for Miss Annabel to run into the house for her hat and gloves and whip. And Mrs. Gayland and Penning were left pretty much alone, precisely as Mrs. Gayland had engineered things to be arranged — seeing that, in her estimation at least, even yet, Mrs. Branstane was little more than a piece of furniture.

Mrs. Gayland had certain matters on her mind.

"Isn't she pretty!" she exclaimed, after the fleeing figure of her daughter.

"Extremely!" said Penning.

And there was a pause. What need for further superlatives, when he had long ago exhausted them all!

"Mr. Penning," Mrs. Gayland next said.

Mrs. Gayland, with a righteous object in view, was not accustomed to waste time in superfluous niceties.

"Mr. Penning," she said, "I — of course we've all noticed that you haven't been coming here as regularly as usual. I suppose, as you say, you've been busy. Still, I can't help thinking that perhaps Annabel has been to blame for it. She hasn't been treating you just as nicely as she might, and —"

She paused for contradiction. And, seeing that

something of the sort was required of him, Penning did murmur a word of remonstrance.

"Oh, yes! Of course you would say so, out of politeness. But I couldn't help remembering how she has behaved to you in times before. It was none of my doing, Mr. Penning. Oh, I was so mortified by Annabel, when my husband was running for the Judgeship. I strongly counseled against my daughter's impertinent behaviour. But really, Annabel is a good-hearted girl. She means to be very helpful. And I — I trust you will not lose patience with her, Mr. Penning. Remember, she is very young. I'm sure she will improve."

Appealingly Mrs. Gayland glanced at Penning. And bravely he murmured what he could in the way of polite assent. Albeit with an ungovernable curl to his lip.

A curl of the lip not lost upon Mrs. Branstane, surely, who watched the scene from the kitchen window — and not without a curl of her own lip.

And when Miss Annabel reappeared, all unconscious, her mother, to stir the girl to her best endeavours, gave her a warning pat on the shoulder, as Penning assisted her to her seat in the modish rake so much beloved of her father, with its yellow wheels, its black body, and its smart lines.

And so, in that fashion, Miss Gayland and Judge Penning set forth on that pleasant afternoon for the drive which was to accomplish so much for the health and spirits of the young Judge.

And so the curve on Mrs. Branstane's lip deepened. She was obliged to bend deeply indeed over her embroidery for the rest of the afternoon, in order to conceal her enjoyment of Mrs. Gayland's idiocy.

Everything that Mrs. Gayland had said seemed calculated with the very genius of idiocy, to diminish the regard of Judge Penning for the subject of his expected adoration. What could he see any longer in these Gaylands! Mrs. Branstane trusted to his good sense.

And how passed the time with the precious pair on their drive?

Soft little swansdown clouds were dusting the sky to its deepest blue. The clean, new foliage on maple and elm, still left untarnished by the sterner heat of summer, rustled and fluttered in the merry breeze, and the fields of growing and ripening wheat swayed in billowy oceans of vegetable water that hovered between green and yellow. The brooks babbled and the birds obligingly sang — robins, and orioles, and wrens, and song sparrows. But unheard in this mid-summer symphony, and unseen in this summer picture, were the cry and the hurt that grew in the heart of Miss Annabel.

She drove Judge Penning across the Bayard Street bridge, spanning the lazy river, and urged her horse into a smart trot along the River Drive — a wide and smooth road, now edging close to the broad and placid stream, now turning away and mounting some spur from the mountain to the left, ever and anon lifting them to some enchanting view over the Ross-acre Bowl, over the northward hills, all chequered with growing crops, with the river meandering between like a broad green-edged ribbon of silver. Beside it the city lay dozing away under its ten thousand trees. Plumes of quiet factory smoke trailed in fixed — in petrified — flutters against the

sky. Far down the valley came the occasional flirt of steam from the whistle of a locomotive, soundlessly far away. To their left the rumpled and tumbled surface of the tree-covered mountainside leaned against the blue sky. All the pains of life, all the struggles of the world, all its contentions and clashings, seemed banished as far away as the soundless and material whistles of the distant locomotives. This was a picture of peace.

And so, in the former Judge's cart, they tooled along the Drive — the precise route observed by Penning on his hysterical walk of a fortnight before. What ingenuity in Annabel could have chosen it! And side by side sat these two proud creatures, in their modish vehicle, with nothing to divide them but the thin gap of air between their two skulls — and yet not very close together.

Bravely and blithely Annabel urged the lone horse they had saved from the Judge's once populous stable. With her whip poised cockily in her hand, with the reins held in superb form, the real strain on her was not the control of the spirited nag but the control of her more spirited self. Hurt as she was by Penning's stubborn aloofness, Annabel yet strove by a thousand pretty devices to invite him to unburden himself of the great and mysterious aches, whatever they were, that crushed him.

A becoming civility was due from him — but so he sate stiffly beside his fair driver, and tried to listen. In a very grand humour was Penning — with nothing beside him, in all the boasted resources of feminine sympathy, but this amiable chatter! In spite of himself he recalled Mrs. Branstane's phrase about the twittering canary.

There beside him sat Annabel; and seeing that this day, and so many other days, had gone ill with him, she forgot her own ill-going days and exerted herself to the uttermost to be inventive and cause him to be forgetful. For days he had been ungracious to her. Yet she too was proud. Her utmost she had done, her utmost she was willing to do, to ease and please him — but no more. Pride will have its way, cost what it will. One love, only, in her life, for Miss Annabel. Not the sort to shift lightly was she. One sun enough for her sky. If it sank, the rest of her life was night, that was all.

And her sun had been sinking. Almost studiedly, it seemed, Penning had been hurting her with his abrupt desertion. How many more drives might they take in such a humour as this one now!

And yet, for all of Penning's inexplicable behaviour, Miss Annabel heroically spurred her weary and wounded wits, to cool the smarts, whatever they were, that oppressed her lordly companion. Of how blue was the sky she babbled, and of the fineness of the roses that year — of anything that was not a painful thought.

But, at such a time, mere skies and roses! Inwardly Penning groaned at apostrophes to the confounded sky. Not with such twitterings were his overwhelming woes to be appeased.

Thus the ridiculous pair pursued their way.

Only when Annabel remarked upon the heavy cold that had settled upon Senator Banks, they feared with threats of pneumonia, or perhaps a spell of the heart, did Penning revive — with consequent hurt to Annabel. To mention of Senator Banks he could respond, but not to her!

And so, in that absurd fashion, the afternoon rolled by. Absent-mindedly, at one point, Annabel took the wrong road, and stubbornly protested she was right, while Penning grew openly tart in correction. When they did reach home at last, it was late and dark. Long ago Mrs. Gayland and Mrs. Branstane had finished their dinner, and retired, each to her haven of seclusion. In vain Annabel besought Penning to wait for a bit of refreshment — and was secretly relieved at his refusal.

Penning, bitter in spirit, after a perfunctory leave-taking, stalked round to the barn, to perform the service of putting away the nag. While his irritation grew.

The Gayland stable was unfamiliar to him, and the labour cost him time — the more time since he was slowed by the force of his reflections. With his lip curled, and feeling cheated of every good thing in the world, not omitting plain human comprehension, the able Judge Penning stumbled about the stable, barked his shins, dragged the harness off the horse, and stowed things to rights as he could in the gathering gloom.

In the Gayland house, whether he knew it or not, Penning had left another badly ruffled little scrap of human existence.

Like a good many other poor humans, Annabel had scanty means of reading the future. As many of us have noticed at times, the great crying evil in our dear world is that one's life may be lived only once. No generous provision has been made for living it over in a corrected form, its painful mistakes made right, its hungry yearnings appeased.

No; the yearnings eat on unstopped. The voids

remain unfilled. A few fortunate persons may avoid these embarrassments. The more unlucky are obliged to eke out their brief existences as they may.

One of these voids Judge Penning had left behind him in the once merry Gayland mansion.

In not many minutes he was acutely reminded of this, as, out of the many-roomed house, in the stillness and chill of the gathering night, Miss Annabel crept, when she thought Penning had gone. And because there was no one else she might seek, Miss Annabel wrapped herself in a light scarf and stole away to the horse.

Without troubling to turn on a light, so well she knew and loved the place, she waded through the straw in the box-stall, and threw her arms about the neck of the startled but whinnying beast.

"Oh, you — my blessed!" she said to this wondering proxy, who stood for the sympathy and understanding everywhere else denied her.

For it came over the girl that, such was the quality that had ever stood between Penning and herself, never had she acquired a single pet diminutive from his awkward name by which to possess him. Even in his name he seemed to stand distant.

"You dear thing!" was all she could think to say, over and over, in the hunger of her heart.

In the next stall, motionless, for fear of startling her with a single sound, Penning stood waiting for her to finish and go, and heard it all.

For a long time Annabel clung to the horse, aimlessly patting his neck and pouring out her heart to him.

CHAPTER II

DEAR thing!" She was saying. "That means you, Peter. Or that is, partly you. . . . You dear!" . . . And a long silence.

The hungry horse, munching his meagre ration, created just enough noise to save Penning, who, with nothing but a thin partition between, feared to breathe for fear of betraying his presence and frightening her, and yet was impatient for her to leave, and free him.

But she stayed on. "Best friend I've got, now, Peter!" she was saying, and trying her utmost to keep her voice steady. "Sometimes, Peter, I think you're the *only* friend I've got."

Another little stretch of silence, with a quiet grunt from the horse.

"Peter, you don't know how lucky you are in being a horse."

So, as words offered their poor services, Annabel relieved her mind of its burden, thought by thought, with intervals of waiting for their formation.

"Just put yourself in my place, Peter. Wouldn't it puzzle your wise old head if things — if just everything — without reason — dropped away from you? . . .

"And when you had tried your — your very best to — to do your part, Peter? Wouldn't it puzzle you, too? . . .

"It certainly puzzles me, Peter. I must be so much

stupider than I ever thought I was." She laughed lightly. "Don't you see how trying it is to be a human being? . . .

"The world seems so awfully shaky. To us human beings, anyway. Somebody will always be taking care of *you*, Peter. Even if I can't. You know, we may have to give you up, too. Will you mind? . . .

"You won't mind so much as I shall. That's another point where you're lucky. It must be fine to be a horse. I'm so jealous of you! Maybe, where you're going, they'll give you more oats. But they won't make any more fuss over you! They can't, can they? . . .

"There! I've just remembered!"

Penning crouched as he heard Annabel rustle through the straw and grope her way over the plank floor of the barn to a corner near the door, and there scrape a nearly empty bin for another measure of feed. A minute more, another rustle through the bedding, and he heard the splash of the grain in the manger, and the grateful snort of Peter.

"There!" Annabel said. "It's shameful, the way you've been neglected! I'm going to make it up, for as long as we can keep you." . . . More patting. . . .

"You see, Peter, I've had so much on my mind. But you wait! I'll take care of you *now*! I've *got* to have someone to take care of. And you won't mind a bit that it's just the leavings, will you? Because that's just the lovely character of a horse. . . .

"Dear thing! . . .

"But really, Peter, I've been so *frightfully* hurt. I wish you could tell me, candidly, what's the matter with me. Because, why is it that I've never tried to — to be nice, you know, to anybody, but — but

anybody turned right away from me so soon. I can't understand it. . . .

"If it had happened just once, why — it was just a happening. But when it's happened in one case in particular, then it looks awfully as if it were my own fault. . . .

"Do you suppose, Peter, it's because the world is so terribly difficult to get along in that I just haven't got cleverness enough? I hope you'll say 'No.' But I know that's just what's the matter."

Again Annabel laughed softly.

"You see, I wanted to be so nice to him. So that he'd be nice to me. . . .

"Perhaps that was the whole trouble!" she said with a new animation, as if in discovery. "Maybe that was just it! Because I expected something back! . . .

"Yes, now I see it! You mustn't think of — of swapping even, Peter. Ever. You're bound to lose. You've got to give yourself. Freely. And then just trust."

More vigorous patting.

"Oh, I'm so glad I've found that out, Peter! . . .

"And yet, don't you think it was *natural* of me? To want somebody to be nice to me? Some particular one? You know yourself how lonely it's been of late. Don't you miss Daddy? *Course* you do! We ought to be good friends to each other, you and I, oughtn't we! Because, Peter" — in a more tremulous voice — "you have no idea how cruel the world really is! I simply can't understand it! People seem to be good-hearted, and all that, in themselves. But they get all mixed up, and in each other's way, and injure each other so much. Without being able to help it. They just bump together by accident."

For some moments Annabel seemed to wonder about this. Then she laughed her quiet laugh.

"But isn't it nice to have someone rub the bruises! . . .

"Probably he's got too many of his own to think of mine. Do you think so? . . .

"Maybe some day I'll understand. . . .

"But Peter!"

The horse filled the quiet stable with a dozen startled steps as Annabel shocked him with a sudden embrace of his neck.

"Peter, wherever you go, *you* 'll think of me, sometimes?"

There she went to pieces altogether. And sobbed.

And burst out, "O-oh, I don't care if I *am* stupid. I've got feelings, too! And oh, Peter, I've been so lonely!" . . .

But just when Penning could endure it no longer, Mrs. Branstane opened the stable door and created a diversion, welcome though it came from her.

"Annabel, Annabel! Are you here?"

Pulling herself together as she could, Annabel answered, "Yes, Brannie. Coming."

"For heaven's sake, girl! Where have you been! We've hunted you high and low. I told your mother you'd surely eloped." Mrs. Branstane laughed, and could not forbear to add, "You've no idea how pleased she was to hear it!"

"Yes, Brannie, dear."

Crouching low in his stall, in deadly fear that Mrs. Branstane's hand might find an electric switch, Penning heard Annabel's patient laugh in response to the cruel witticism, and her rapid steps through Peter's bedding toward the door.

"I just wanted to make sure that Peter was comfortable for the night," he heard her fib in explanation.

"Hurry!" the two voices died away as the door was being shut. "Sylvia has been calling you on the 'phone. The Senator is worse. They 're all excited. And they want you right away. I 've got a coat for you. Run. I 'll be down later, if there 's anything I can do."

The door closed, and was locked.

When he thought it safe, Penning stepped quickly to a window, climbed through, and stole away under the shadows of the Gayland trees.

CHAPTER III

FOR the second time since their down-coming the Banks family had moved. The apartment they had found, after their removal from the mansion on the Avenue, since it was a bit expensive because still a bit fashionable, they had vacated for a more modest house in the row along St. Mark's Place. Every penny that the Senator could spare from the direst needs of his family he had crowded into his promising little enterprise in the laundry. Even his life-insurance had been pared down to a naked minimum, to save every cent of capital for his business.

On his escape from the Gayland stable Penning had walked back through the garden to the little alley in the rear. Down this alley he stumbled several blocks, over rubbish and ashes. When he had got a block or two down he turned toward the Avenue, not before dusting his shoes with a handkerchief. The inspection of his sporting attire, under the glow of an arc-light flickering through the heavy foliage of the surrounding trees, gave him an impulse to fly to the Club and shift to something more sober, but he clove to his course instead, at the urgency of the Senator's extremity.

The Banks house was the last in the row in St. Mark's Place, and divided from the railroad station by only the width of a street and a vacant lot. The nearest light stood in the little park about the adjoining City Hotel, and intervening trees so shaded

the Banks piazza that Penning had mounted the step before descrying, near the door and in the shadows, the figure of Mrs. Branstane, waiting for an answer to her ring.

Except that she had already seen him, he would have drawn back and waited till she was within, any trifling association with her, in any place, under any conditions, was so violent an irritation.

"We're just in time, Mr. Penning," Mrs. Branstane said.

At the "we" Penning winced. Who wanted Mrs. Branstane, least of all Senator Banks, intruding at such a time!

"Looks pretty dark to me," she added. "The doctor says he has endocarditis. And I know what that is! The very thing my father died of. Isn't it funny!"

Who the devil cared about Mrs. Branstane's father!

"There's a delirium goes with it. The patient is crazy to get out of bed. And that's fatal. If he stirs it's all over. I can just guess what a time they're having with him. You know, Sylvia and Mrs. Banks have been nursing him themselves. To save expense."

Here, saving further consultation with Dr. Branstane, the door was opened by the daughter of a neighbouring family.

Inside the door Penning caught sounds of Mrs. Banks's frightened wailing, somewhere upstairs, the excited chatter of the Senator, and Sylvia's desperate endeavour to persuade him back to bed again.

"I tell you, my daughter, I can't *live* on medicine! That's all you've given me for two whole weeks. I tell you I'm tired of it. Get me my pants, do you

hear? How many times must I ask you! Things are always 'put away' in this household! How many times must I remind you that I've got important business on hand? The most important business of my whole career. Go get my pants, there's a dear! Sylvia, I've always been a good father to you. Must I remind you of that! Take your hands off me, I say. You women are just plain damned nuisances! You've no conception of the business worries of a man. Let me go. Stand back, I say! There! Now! Hand me those papers there, on the chair beside the bed. *That's the girl!*"

Clearly the Senator was having his way at last.

"Where's Dr. Claverson?" Penning demanded of the helpful girl from next door.

"He's out in the country, attending a case. Mr. Brookes has gone after him in his car."

"Get somebody else, in God's name! The man's in danger! Where's the telephone?"

"They have none. Shall I run over home and call someone?"

"Anyone! The nearest!"

Penning, with his foot on the bottom step, about to fly up and try his persuasion on the intractable sufferer, was halted by a sudden apparition at the head of the stairs. In appearance it was the animated figure of a little man of eighty, who bore a faint resemblance to the Senator.

For a moment the figure stood there, his legs, now pitifully wasted, jutting from beneath an old-fashioned night-shirt. Even since Penning had last seen the Senator, a fortnight or so before, his hair had grown perceptibly more streaked with grey. Now two round spots of red enlivened the putty colour of the

face, and the sunken eyes glowed and blazed with excitement.

At sight of Penning the Senator started down the stair, one arm loaded with his papers, the other feeling carefully along the banister.

"Well! My eye, Landis, you 've come! Really I didn't expect it of you. Forgive me! It never pays, does it, to think wrong of any man! He always — Bless my soul, but these stairs are steep!" The Senator had tripped and almost fallen. "We've got to have them ripped out and built right. Well, I declare, Landis, I believe you've grown taller! Always progressing, eh?"

By then the Senator had reached the bottom and grasped Penning's arm, as if in greeting, but really to steady himself. Even in his alarm Penning was touched by the man's effort to ignore his own desperate condition.

"Hadn't you better see me in your room, Senator?" Penning asked, by way of beginning his persuasion.

"No, my friend. This is a great occasion. They're all coming. I've sent for them all. Every creditor I've got, omitting none. It wouldn't be fitting to receive them anywhere but right in my parlour — the best room in the house. Come in."

For a minute it seemed to Penning that he himself was the man in delirium, and Banks the figure in vigorous health, such was the curious respect, even awe, inspired by the man's solemn extremity. For all the sufferer's volubility, there was about him a dignity, an air of importance and of noble resolve, such that, delirious though he was, it was difficult to interrupt and contradict him. Without resistance Penning suffered the Senator to lead him into the

dimly lighted parlour, awaiting a better opportunity of fighting the sick man back to his bed.

Following the Senator down the stairs came Sylvia, it seemed to Penning, in his fleeting glimpse of her, never so lovely as in her anguish, mutely imploring his assistance. Mrs. Banks had frankly collapsed and sought her room.

"Let me get a coat for you, Senator!" Penning urged.

"Good Lord, man! This is summer time! I'm burning up, as it is. Thanks, just the same."

In the parlour, beside the table with its darkly shaded lamp, stood Annabel, reaching out in her alarm for the hand of Mrs. Branstane who stood near. Occupied as he was with the Senator, Penning had time to be struck by that instinctive act of the girl. To him it was still so everlastingly significant.

But from then on there was no stopping the Senator. He talked down all remonstrance. He held them breathless. Indeed, not one of them but had a sense that it was too late to resist him, in a fear that he had already fatally damaged himself.

In the broad doorway between the little parlour and the adjoining dining-room the little Senator took his stand, his head held high, one hand upon the door frame to keep him steady. It was clearly a supreme moment for him.

"Come closer, Landis," he said to Penning. "This is mainly for your benefit, my friend. Though in spite of that it's mighty good of you to come all the way from New York. I always knew you for a man. You understand just what I want. I know you'd do the same in *my* situation. You'd want to settle things with a bit of a flourish, just as I want

to do here. Let's see, are we all here? Gentlemen, you'll pardon me for a little pride on this occasion. This is a great moment in my life. Fortune has smiled on me at last. I have here" — the Senator held aloft the packet of papers that he had kept tightly clutched under his arm — "I have here the wherewithal to meet every last obligation against me, and leave me a substantial residue besides. That helps you to understand how I feel, I'm sure. You'll admit, one can hardly help a feeling of honest pride."

The Senator's eyes filled, in his generous emotion.

"First of all I want to offer thanks to my wife and my daughter, thus publicly. Without their loyal aid I should never have been able to reach this happy settlement. To them I want to render whatever credit there may be in a man's paying his honest debts. It has cost them dear. Without a murmur they have given up for my sake all that was dear in their former lives. I hardly know which of them has suffered the more. Which of them has given me the greater encouragement." . . .

Like the others, Sylvia, and Annabel, and the sympathising and helpless inquiring neighbours, Penning was amazed, impressed by this unexpected flow of speech, wrung by the poignant irony of the situation.

"Take the case of my dear daughter Sylvia," the Senator was saying. "Never have I heard a word of complaint from her lips, while we were all striving together to be even with the world and be back in our old places. Yet it must have been galling bitter to her. Every day she has faced little privations, little stings to her pride, but all bravely borne without a murmur. She has not been able to wear what her

friends wore. It has been painful to her to return calls, and more painful still to accept invitations to entertainments where she was once — I am proud to say — a modest belle. Her friends have been more than kind, but in spite of themselves they have gradually fallen away. That, after all, was only natural. They have their own little activities. They have made their usual little trips to New York. They have their new frocks and frills — things which my daughter has been obliged to forego for a time. It would only have embarrassed my daughter to be among her former friends. Indeed they have been kind to her in sparing her the painful contrast between their happy lot and her own.

“As for my good wife, nothing could equal her patience in a very trying time. Far from thinking of herself, she has been wholly devoted to bringing about this happy moment. I owe it to her above all. You will pardon me, I am sure, this little public tribute, which they both so richly deserve. Of myself there is nothing to say — except this. Take this to heart, my friends, and put it to practice in your business, as I have done. I stand here, able to pay you, because I have had faith in men. Nothing else pays except faith in men. There have been those who have said ungenerous things about my friend Landis, here. For myself I have always known that he was sorely abused.”

For a moment Penning studied the Senator closely, to mark if this were an outpouring of the bitterest sarcasm. The next instant he was certain of the Senator's sincerity. The little man lifted his voice, as if he were conscious of addressing a considerable assembly.

"Gentlemen," — his audience was composed almost solely of women — "Mr. Landis has been harshly criticised in Rossacre. Friends have warned me that he alone was responsible for my business troubles. I can't believe it. Mr. Landis got his training under my own eye. If he has made enemies it is because his cleverness has excited jealousy. I happen to know that Mr. Landis himself is not to blame for my difficulties, and it gives me the utmost pleasure to set him right before you. As I have always believed, Mr. Landis is a manly man. A woman urged him to act as he did, to my disadvantage. He was under the spell of a woman when he did it. He has told me so himself, as one man to another, in a letter. I have it with me now. Well, any man is to be forgiven mistakes made under the spell of a woman. It's the way of the world.

"So, gentlemen, as I started to say to Landis himself on coming down the stairs, it never pays to think wrongly of any man. He always comes out best. The man who is wrong is wrong because he thinks wrong. This is a hard world, in which progress of any sort is so difficult that often one man does serious injury to another quite unintentionally, while in the pursuit of interests that are entirely legitimate. Of course I realise that I am now in a position to be generous. I am able to pay what I owe. Yet I have always known the truth about Mr. Landis; only, I have never been manly enough to admit it. What happened to me was my own fault. This, I think, is the chief advantage attached to wealth. It lifts us out of the realm of jealousy, and permits us to be just. And I have learned that one cannot be just without being kindly. I have so often misjudged men

that I have come to mistrust all judgments that are not generous. Take the example of my young friend Mr. Penning, our brilliant young Judge and future Governor, who, by the way" — the Senator glanced searchingly about the room. And only then, in this break of silence, might Penning judge fully of the amazing mental effort represented in this burst of uncontrolled delirium.

"I wish Judge Penning could have been here with us this evening," the Senator was rushing on. "This occasion would have gratified him even more than myself. Unfortunately he is ill. He too has been cruelly misunderstood. He is really ill of that very misunderstanding. And that also caused by a woman."

There a ring at the door cut short for a space this remarkable harangue. Sherry Brookes had arrived with Dr. Claverson.

First to greet them was the Senator himself. To their utmost amazement he rushed over to the hall entry, though unsteadily, holding out his hand.

"Billings! Rhodes! And you, too, Mr. Sedgwick! I'm glad to see you! I knew you'd come, and I'm ready to meet you!" He turned back again to the frightened women in the parlour. "Gentlemen, since we are all here now, let us come down to business at once. It won't take long to dispose of the sordid details, and then I am sure my good wife will offer you some refreshments. She is probably arranging them now. Here, Landis" — the Senator said to Penning — "you are a man strictly for business. I've probably tired you with the more sentimental side of this transaction — for all you understand what it means to me."

From under his arm the Senator drew one of the

packets of papers, whisked off a rubber band, selected a document, and gravely handed it to Penning.

"There, my friend! I think you will find in that bundle of bonds all that is necessary to satisfy your claims against me, in full."

In wonderment, and with a glance at Claverson, who responded with a shake of his head, Penning turned the papers over.

They consisted of cancelled checks, long past whatever usefulness they might once have served in the Senator's business transactions. All the papers under his arm were the same cancelled checks — except memoranda of the notes which he had been long trying in vain to meet and discharge.

As the Senator stepped toward Claverson, with another of his packets of "bonds," he suddenly dropped the papers, and clutched at his heart, and wavered, and sank into the nearest chair. In a second Claverson had recovered from his astonishment and was at the Senator's side, motioning to Penning for aid.

"Don't bother!" the Senator said, brokenly, as the two men placed their hands under his arms, to carry him hastily to bed. "It's nothing. I've often had these spells. At the office. Never said anything about them. Didn't want to worry the family."

Even in his dire extremity the Senator forgot nothing of the large and ceremonious manner which, it appeared, he had long before rehearsed and committed to heart in preparation for this long meditated occasion.

"I presume — the pleasure of this — this rare event has been — too much for me. I — must have a moment for rest."

Startled at finding himself lifted by hands that seemed strange to him, the Senator looked up in quick suspicion into the faces of his two friends. And as he dimly recognised them, the wrecking hand of reason reached through this rosy haze of his fancy and shattered it. For an instant, Penning thought, Banks realised that he had been hoaxing himself. For an instant he knew that he was not relieved after all of his long heavy burden.

And deliberately, and as if with a violent effort, he tried to fling himself back into his brilliant illusion. With a jerk he freed himself, and stood to his feet, clear of their assistance, with his fists clenched and upraised. Then the old and well-known Senator spoke.

"Oh," he shouted, "*I have* done it! Yes, I have! I've got it done! We're going ahead, Sallie! We're going back where we belong! Better than ever! There's a perfect avalanche of money rolling in. That little laundry — A perfect avalanche —"

Sylvia screamed.

For suddenly the Senator had thrown his arms above his head — a sinister symptom. His tongue protruded, and pushed his lips outward. He fell back, choking and gasping for breath. His face had taken on the hue of fire-clay. Then his jaw dropped, his eyes roved over the room in one glance of final comprehension, his arms fell limply to his side. And Penning, in the whirl of many impressions, was aware of looking on for the first time at the phenomenon of death.

An avalanche had truly engulfed his friend, and the Senator, as he wished, was in the state of eternal solvency.

CHAPTER IV

AFTERWARD Penning could remember his bewildered discharge of such helpful duties as fell to him — their carrying the dead Senator upstairs, his own efforts to calm the distracted women, the telegrams he sent to distant relatives and friends. He remembered — with surprise and with other emotions — having kissed Annabel as he left her to keep vigil with Sylvia through the night. Natural enough it seemed, as he thought of it afterward. Life is never more eagerly assertive of itself than in the presence of death. In the shadow of this sobering occurrence the value of their relationship — and how ancient, now, it seemed — was made suddenly clear, as if nothing had ever happened to obscure it.

With even more surprise, and in much amusement, Penning could also recall the confusion, the sheer excess of his fervour to be helpful, which had moved him to send Mrs. Branstane home in a taxi, though her journey homeward was not above two honest blocks. The exquisite irony of her being there, in ruins of her own creation, was too much for him.

Till twelve o'clock Penning stayed at the Banks dwelling, reluctant to leave, eager still for the simplest service to perform. Then, with Sherry Brookes, he left for his rooms at the Club.

Still, on reaching the Avenue, it had occurred to him to send Sherry there by himself. These strange new excitements Penning wanted to have to himself,

apart. He wanted to carry them away with him, on a solitary walk, that he might contrive to understand them.

He wanted to get away, and be ashamed. And do it thoroughly.

Along the way he met no one. The town and the night were his alone. Yet the familiar scene — the old houses, the old trees and fences that composed it — was as unfamiliar as if he had been years abroad and had only just returned.

The scene was the same, but the man was different.

In the middle of the bridge across the river he was halted as much by the beauty of the night as by the teeming matters in his mind that demanded comprehension. And leaning over the iron rail he stood there for a season.

Over the mountain ridge at his right leered the ghostly half of a decrepit waning moon. Beneath him the water was as still, and looked as cold, as ice. Down the stream about a mile the other bridge connecting the two halves of the town stretched its iron tracery like black lace against the distant haze, and a last trolley-car crossed it like a lighted spider on its web. Beyond, the solid humps of the hills seemed to be sinking into a morass of mist. Far down, on the right bank of the river, a steel mill sent up periodic gasps of grisly fire from its furnaces. Now and then, near at hand, a bird in the willows along the banks broke its slumbers with a twitter. From an old scow moored at a little wharf beside the bridge rose the odour of wet wood. The whole scene seemed eerie and unreal.

Gradually the hubbub in Penning's ears, of but an hour before — of women's lamentations, of all the

sounds and incidents of the Banks house — died down. And then the vision of the little Senator stood out. The whole vision of him, from this end to-night, back to the beginning of their friendship. That vision alone seemed real.

Always Penning had properly valued Banks, or thought he had. But no man truly lives till he is dead. Only then does he stamp himself upon the living. Only then does he sum up the final total of himself. And only then did the Senator impress himself upon Penning for what he was. Phrases of his remarkable address to his fancied creditors came back to Penning. In truth not till then did Penning hear it, with all his dread and excitement abated. The whole crushing irony of the thing reconstructed itself in memory.

Strange revelation of a man! . . .

And yet, all that goodness in the Senator, so long unuttered, and unsuspected, was not incredible. It might have come as a surprise, but not as a contradiction. There among them all Banks had lived, outwardly a shrewd man of business, nothing more, chattering, and sometimes chattering to the verge of boredom, the jargon of trade; yet all the while he had been hiding away within himself these fine things, possibly because he was too modest, too fine, to want to seem superior. Part of the very fineness was this trait of hiding itself away. Only at the impulse and the license of delirium had it been exposed at all. Once only had Banks spoken; but then in what a manner!

"The sweetest gentleman that God ever made!" Penning said to himself fervently.

It may well have been that many times the little

Senator had rehearsed the part he meant to play on the great occasion of his rehabilitation. Long before he must have fashioned it out, and memorised the very words he meant to speak.

And finally had uttered them in vain. . . .

Annabel, too — But for Annabel remained the whole future. In the exchange of a hasty word or two before he left the stricken house they had understood each other. It was the present instead that invited — that commandeered — his mind.

Off over the seething little metropolis, sprawling away to his left, Penning turned his gaze — over the real half of Rossacre, wasting its multitude of lights on a population sleeping now, save for its points of secret dissipation, the beer or poker parties, the furtive cock-fight in some barn along its fringes — and he wondered how many other such ironic dramas, like this one he had just witnessed and played in, might be running their course there and then. Even if he had begun his life elsewhere — anywhere else — mightn't it have run much the same? Wasn't it all a piece of our queer and dear America? Or was it simply life? . . .

Drifting back from this excursion of fancy, to the facts as they were, Penning surprised himself in a smile. The smile became a quiet laugh as he summoned back the exaggerated, the hysterical vision he had once entertained of Mrs. Branstane — as of a sort of wild animal at large. Suddenly he was seeing her differently — safely caged in her own enormities. Whatever new tricks she might play with him now would only free him further and snare her the more. Banks had shown him the way. Gayland, Landis, Banks, and the past — with such forces on Penning's side,

what now had he to fear? And so, immune from her, even in fancy, he could smile as he held her off in review.

There, calmly and coolly among them, in perfect security, was a murderer as surely as murder was ever done with dirk or bludgeon. And not a vestige of a case at law stood against her. Not a jury could send her to her death. No Judge could pass sentence upon her head. Not a vengeful hand could be lifted against her, except in crime. Yet there she was, laying about her as she pleased, slaying, and indifferent to the slaughter. . . .

But was she so much a monster after all, Penning wondered. In this more reasoned survey he began to understand her. He seemed to see in her, only the more candidly outspoken in her coarser mind, the same impulses that finer people all about him eagerly obeyed and tried to hide — this whole godless rush and grab of the time; the abject worship of success, the passion for power and position and money, no matter how attained; the willingness of women to impose upon the chivalry of men; the willingness of men to cheat, to rob openly; even poor human opinion shirking its duties of restraint; anything, everything forgiven if it is clever; and decency too ridiculously costly, honesty too senseless and ruinous for all but the prig and the fool. It was all in Mrs. Branstane. . . .

Again Penning laughed. This was making the woman a monster only of another sort. There she was, in her physical presence, nothing but an ordinary nuisance after all.

“Well,” Penning said, finally, aloud, “she shall pass!”

From a case in his waistcoat pocket he drew a cigar and lighted it, coolly. And with the same deliberation he started home. He revelled in his calm. He whistled as he walked. And swung his arms. It was he, and no longer Mrs. Branstane, that had a story to tell.

As he turned back into the Avenue from Bayard Street, a lone light was still aglow at the top of the Gayland house; and for a moment he halted beneath a tree, to enjoy fully the exquisite irony of its untroubled burning. Even waved a nonchalant fist toward it.

In a moment he was passing on. He wanted now to talk. To divulge. He wanted to be ashamed publicly. Even Sherry would do for that. And he went home, and fished the limp and somnolent Sherry from his bed, and made him sit up and listen. And gradually Sherry awakened, and whistled frequently, in gathering amazement at the story unfolded. At Gayland's part in the recital he only grinned. When they came to the astounding consequences that had levelled the Senator, Sherry leaped up, and swore, and reached for his clothing, and was moved to instant recourse to his favourite expedient of riding an offender out of town on a rail.

When they came to Penning's own unwilling rôle in the drama, and his apprehension for the events that might be still in store for him, the now feverishly alert Sherry melted away into apoplectic laughter. The boy writhed in his bed, in a paroxysm of merriment.

"Oh, you awful boob! You innocent!" he was barely able to articulate, between his gasps. "And you don't see it! Never fear," Sherry rose and

clapped Penning's shoulder, "she won't harm you. She wouldn't touch a hair of your dear old, thick old head!"

"I — I *don't* believe I fathom your meaning," Penning said, to the accompaniment of worse and further laughter. "But I don't believe you'll have to resort to your rail. I begin to think she'll attend to all that herself," he added in solemn conviction.

CHAPTER V

FROM Penning's flowery return of her to her home, in the taxi from the door of the Banks house, Mrs. Branstane had flown up the stairs to her room and to the mirror on her dressing table. There, for half an hour, late as it was, she sat rearranging her hair, and redraping her kimono, and trying the effect of various smiles, and rehearsing a hundred and one winning ways of the eye. It was the first moment in some days that she had felt again positively secure in him. She remembered the curl of his lip as late as his drive that afternoon with Annabel, though now it seemed days ago, when he had set forth with the twittering girl. The meaning of that token, otherwise trivial, she read unmistakably when he had sent her those two blocks home in the taxi. And this was not all.

Waiting up for Annabel, in ignorance of her intention of staying with Sylvia, Mrs. Branstane had seen Penning pass on the beginning of his contemplative stroll in the night; and on the slim chance of his repassing that way she had waited longer. When he did return, and did pass that same way, and — could she doubt her own eyes! — even paused in the shadow of a tree long enough for a flourish of his hand toward her lighted window, Mrs. Branstane's heart had beat like a fluttering bird. Only a single significance was attached to that salute. Senator Banks was dead, all things were dead that had stood

in the way. So Mr. Penning intended. And no one had ever yet deceived Mrs. Branstane.

She was drunk, blind drunk, on her middle-aged fancies. On her success in "society." Her head was turned completely.

Even when at last Mrs. Branstane turned off the light and sought her couch, it was half an hour longer, and after many restless tossings, as if she called upon her very bed to witness her joy, before she found repose, and in repose, security.

Because, of late, she had caught in her little world of teas and tosh a sense of instability. Of late the invitations, to teas, to golfing engagements, to week-ends at sundry cottages along the river, had dropped off notably. And Mrs. Branstane had not been able to blind herself to the reason.

Always Mrs. Branstane had prospered solely by obliging sensitive people to recoil before her. Cheerfully willing to wound at any time, she was accustomed always to see everyone back away from her. For a time, on entering "society," she was able, by a violent effort of the will, to hold herself in hand and be everywhere deferential. But the love of laying about her with her tongue was not long to be suppressed, and in no great while she was dispensing more jibes at her absent friends than were good for her popularity. Dozens of these jibes she knew were sure to come back upon her. And though a verbal duel was to Mrs. Branstane the very breath of life, she had no taste for a general conspiracy against her, and she was uneasy.

Until the moment of Penning's passing, with the wave of his hand.

If Penning had melted, if Penning approved, what

mattered all else! The women were jealous, that was all. Jealous of her hold on the men. Hadn't she heard echoes, even in society, of the boys' ravings over her eyes, and from the boys themselves? She laughed, as, for the tenth time, she freshly arranged the coverlet about her that night, and remembered the start the Senator had given her. Now she understood it. Even he in his delirium had been paying deference to her powers. Landis, he owned, had been captivated. Nothing in that but a tribute. And where else, except from Penning himself, had the Senator learned that Penning was now also under her spell! It was proved in that wave of Penning's hand! Mrs. Branstane understood that with all the willing comprehension of the love-lorn woman of middle-age. . . .

Little enough she slept, but passed the night in wakeful dreams. No more of Rossacre for the likes of them! Out into the larger world they would go together, she and Penning, and play for the larger stakes. That's what he meant to signify. And what stakes would not be at the beck of such brains as theirs together! In two or three days the annoying interruption of the Senator's funeral would be over, and then —!

In the morning the first representative of Rossacre to receive Mrs. Branstane's new contempt of the place was her vassal Mrs. Gayland. When Mrs. Branstane descended the stairs that good lady was already brooding alone over the breakfast table, in a lachrymose condition, and garbed in black, as suited her errand of sympathy to the late Senator's wife.

Nice companion for a person in the bridal humour of Mrs. Branstane!

Furtively Mrs. Gayland watched to see what mood in her difficult guest would have to be met on this particular day. And with a sinking heart she observed on Mrs. Branstane a look as black as her own gown, as that worthy seated herself in silence at the table, sniffed critically at the grape-fruit, at the cereal, the eggs, and at the world in general.

Eager to propitiate her angry deity Mrs. Gayland at once began, "Nellie, I hope I didn't offend you the other day, about the punch-bowl, you know. You're not angry with me, are you?"

Mrs. Branstane preserved a contemptuous silence.

"Too bad about the Senator, isn't it?" Mrs. Gayland tried another avenue of intimacy.

With the same result.

"I see you *are* angry about the punch-bowl," she persisted. "But really, Nellie, I never meant to give offence. You believe that, don't you? Because" — Mrs. Gayland blushed and lowered her head over her plate — "because I do need some money soon. To have my enamel fillings renewed. They're something dreadful."

As she looked across at the poor woman Mrs. Branstane frankly laughed. Why bury good enamelled teeth in the grave, when poor fat Mrs. Gayland herself would soon be there!

"Oh, for heaven's sake be still!" Mrs. Branstane snapped. Why should fatuous Rossacre, in the person of this fatuous fool, be suffered to intrude upon her thoughts at such a time!

"Don't be harsh with me, Nellie! I never meant —"

"Oh, hello, people!" a voice said. And the two ladies looked up in some embarrassment at the

apparition of Annabel in the breakfast-room, home from her night with Sylvia.

Now it was Mrs. Gayland's turn to resent an intrusion upon her schemes. "Leave me to do the talking, if you please," she started to say, tartly; but Mrs. Branstane silenced her with an imperious wave of the hand.

"Well?" she immediately challenged the girl, for there was something in Annabel's manner, something in her wise smile, in her calm ignoring of Mrs. Branstane, that amounted to a challenge.

Whatever sauciness the girl might have in mind, Mrs. Branstane was disposed to anticipate it — to anticipate anything, and make short shrift of it.

Still ignoring her, Annabel paused in the doorway with her hands behind her, with her head tilted high, and that smile of quiet self-possession about her lips, and said, taking great pains that her words were addressed to her mother,

"I couldn't help hearing what you've been saying, dear. And I can tell you that your poor teeth — and you — and all about you — will be taken care of. Without relying on Mrs. Branstane."

Annabel came closer, and rested one hand on the table beside her mother's place, and closed the other arm about the tearful woman, and added, coolly,

"Mother, what do you say? Don't you think it's time that you and I were freed of Mrs. Branstane's bondage?"

At that first formal "Mrs. Branstane," the bearer of that imposing name had stiffened electrically in her chair.

Mrs. Gayland instead wilted limply back in her own. When she finally comprehended what had been said, she gasped, "Are — are you — *crazy* — girl?"

But Annabel was busy with candid return of Mrs. Branstane's blazing stare.

Mrs. Branstane too was gasping in astonishment. "‘Bondage!’" she was able to say at last. "‘Bondage indeed! So! *That's* how you take my kindness now, is it? Well! Who's planking down money on you *now?*'"

Annabel simply continued her gaze, but she reddened, she blazed under the insult, nevertheless.

"*Annabel!*" Mrs. Gayland hastened to intervene in the threatened warfare. And she too now stiffened in her chair, to ward off impending disaster. "My daughter, remember where you are! Nellie, be calm, I beg of you! Don't mind the child! Annabel, how you do talk! Do you mean to ruin us outright? Nellie, you know how saucy she has always been! Pay no attention, please! Annabel, I'm ashamed of you!"

The iron in Mrs. Branstane's spine melted suddenly, and she sank back limp with laughter. "O-oh, this is rich!" she gasped, and could say no more for a moment, so violently was her sense of enjoyment tickled. When she had finished her pleasure she said loftily, "Well! My dear girl! You'll — you'll soon enough be free of my 'bondage'! I'm keeping you here —"

"Nellie, Nellie!" Mrs. Gayland sought still to stay the fatal breach.

"Mother!" Sternly the girl silenced her parent.

Mrs. Branstane herself joined in the effort to silence Mrs. Gayland. "Shut up! you fool!" she said, compendiously.

Mrs. Branstane decided at once that her quarrel was with Annabel. Always, it occurred to her,

Annabel was the one who stood across her path. Now she might as well have it out with her. Especially because now it was safe.

"Oh, you needn't grin at me!" she said to the girl. "Suppose — suppose I stopped making my regular contributions to the upkeep of this place? Who's kept it going, pray tell me? How long do you think *you* could keep it going? Could you stay on here alone, without my 'bondage'? Who else is there to do it?"

Mrs. Gayland answered her excitedly. "That — that means we must leave the house, Nellie? You're going to stop! Is that it?"

"Why not?" Mrs. Branstane calmly taunted.

"Leave? *Leave?* O-oh, that can never be!"

"Why not?" Annabel echoed. And again the two women stared in astonishment at the girl's tone of voice.

"*Leave?*" Vainly Mrs. Gayland strove to admit this new idea. "Why! We *can't* do that! . . . Unless" — she looked vaguely from Annabel to the other woman — "unless, of course, we must. . . . *Must* we? So! We *must?*"

Then the wretched storm broke.

Mrs. Gayland, now thoroughly conscious, cried out, "Annabel! You wretched girl! This is your work! Oh, you have always been so wilful!" She turned once again to Mrs. Branstane, in a last appeal. "Nellie, you *know* how wilful she has always been! Pay no attention to her! Don't! Oh, Annabel, you are killing your mother! Just killing me! When I have so much to bear already!"

There Mrs. Gayland laid her hands on the table, and on her hands her head, and wept. When she

looked up again, it was with a fevered face and a most unlovely sententiousness in her gaze.

"It seems to me" — she laughed nervously — "Annabel, that your Mr. Penning himself hasn't been of any great help to us. It doesn't speak well for you, my dear daughter, that he has not been more attentive!"

"Mother!"

"Oh, don't 'Mother' me! Why didn't you tell me the truth about him long ago! Why didn't you tell *him* the truth, about the way we are situated! If he was too stupid to see it for himself!"

"Oh, mother!"

"You could have managed. He's not a gentleman anyway. I wrote to him myself, if you want to know, and begged him to help us, and come and take you. And he hasn't answered a word!"

It was Annabel's turn to entomb her face in her hands. She turned and leaned against the wainscot.

While Mrs. Branstane leaned back in her chair, and gloated, in open laughter.

"Mother," Annabel presently found voice, but not the courage to face about. "I fear you don't understand some things." She was still speaking into the hands pressed against her cheeks.

"Oh, don't I! When everything goes wrong, then I 'don't understand,' eh? I can understand well enough that Nellie will turn us out of our house, because you haven't behaved like a lady!"

"There are other things than fine houses, mother."

"Oh, yes, much you know about life! Nellie!" Mrs. Gayland suddenly screamed, as she saw Mrs. Branstane now rising in disgust and about to leave this distasteful, painful scene. "Nellie, you certainly

don't intend to turn us out! What will people *say!*" And Mrs. Gayland rose also, to follow the retreating Mrs. Branstane with her entreaties. "Nellie! I tell you, I'll wear the skin off my hands for you, rather than have such a thing happen!"

There Annabel firmly caught her mother's arm as she tried to pass through the door. Angrily the mother tried to shake her off. But in the end Annabel stayed her effectively, with words if not otherwise.

"Mother," she said, "You need not — you *shall* not demean yourself like this. To one who is not fit to tie your shoes. Come with me."

With that inspired touch of flattery Annabel worked a miracle. In wide-eyed wonderment, and it seemed for many minutes, Mrs. Gayland stared at this new personage who bore the semblance of her daughter. Slowly the poor woman's manner altered. Slowly she stiffened under Annabel's encouragement.

"E-e-yess!" she said, feeling her way. "You are right, my daughter! That is the truth. How did you discover it! You don't *know* how true that is. She has abused me — oh, you don't *know* how she has abused me, in my own house! I've tried to keep it from you, but it's true."

Mrs. Branstane, not too far distant to overhear this, was quivering with rage at this ungenerous up-rising. And just when she wanted to think of other and pleasanter things! But so long as she had to deal with it, she determined to end it at once, and she returned to laugh and say, roughly, in the very faces of the two Gayland ladies, "*Your* house? Are you *sure* it's *your* house?"

The words might have been bullets, for their effect

upon Mrs. Gayland, who fell back upon Annabel as if she had been shot.

"Think what you owe me!" Mrs. Branstane was saying. "And I've got the receipts to show for it. What else have you got to pay me! What do you think you've got left!"

And she turned away from them in exultation. . . .

"It's true, Annabel," Mrs. Gayland confessed in a whisper. "I — Nellie —" she began afresh.

"Come with me, mother," Annabel contented herself with saying. And with a covering glance toward the retreating Mrs. Branstane she led her stricken mother away and up-stairs, where they spent the remainder of the day in better understanding of their affairs and of each other.

Toward that understanding Mrs. Gayland was liberally assisted by a confession from her daughter.

"Never mind, mother," the girl said. "*I think* Mr. Penning means to help us after all. In fact I know he will." She kissed her mother, rather to hide her own blushes, and added, "In — in a few days he will ask you to give me to him. . . . Will you?"

Effusively Mrs. Gayland drew her daughter to a seat beside her on the divan in their boudoir, and welcomed this addition to her sudden joys with an embrace and a kiss — which Annabel accepted absently. For a moment the girl studied the clasped hands in her lap, and then lifted her head with a self-accusing little laugh.

"Better scold on, Mother. I need it. I've misbehaved. . . . Funny, how long it has taken me to — to see things!"

CHAPTER VI

MRS. BRANSTANE, fleeing to her room for the afternoon, was thrilled with her newest discovery. As she closed the door behind her she burst into laughter — a prolonged convulsion of laughter that reduced her, in time, to limp repose in a chair in sheer exhaustion.

Annabel was jealous!

Not simply that, either. There was a deeper meaning. If Annabel was jealous, there was just cause for it! . . .

Something of a hubbub would result, of course, when the Gayland ladies were tossed out of their house, in case she chose to enforce her will. They might enlist a sympathetic gasp from the town. Still, Mrs. Branstane reflected, few people gird very long at money. In not very long the town would be gasping in quite the opposite emotion, when she and Judge Penning joined forces and hands. It is wonderful, as Mrs. Branstane well knew, how soon the accomplished thing becomes the logical thing. Once really get somewhere, and nobody bothers long to question how you did it. . . .

With these thoughts, principally, rather than with the customary emotions attendant upon the sight of death, Mrs. Branstane walked home, three days later, from the Senator's funeral — alone until, turning out of St. Mark's Place into the Avenue, Mrs. Bemis caught up with her.

Mrs. Bemis also had paid her final respects to the Senator. Seated not far behind Mrs. Branstane, in the meagre Banks parlour, she had decided, as she estimated the appearance of Mrs. Branstane, that whatever the tartness of that lady's tongue there was about her taste in attire an evidence of means which was not to be disregarded. It was always wise to be nice to Mrs. Branstane.

"What a frightfully cunning gown!" Mrs. Bemis called, most sweetly, as she braved the heat of the August day to catch up with her friend. "Fresh from New York, I know! And you look perfectly dear!"

"Oh, hello, Ethel!" Mrs. Branstane condescended, none too graciously. She wanted to be alone with her fancies. "Dear of you to say so. But really, I was thinking of something besides dress."

"Of course you were!" Mrs. Bemis laughed back, not a whit abashed by the rebuke. "I can *guess* where your thoughts were!" she added, archly. "You certainly had your eyes on him the whole time. Fearfully handsome and dignified and *distingué*, isn't he!"

Mrs. Branstane lowered her head, and flushed. And Mrs. Bemis laughed the more, at sight of this phenomenon of a blush on Mrs. Branstane's cheek.

"Oh," that lady said shortly, "if you mean Judge Penning, of *course* he cuts a good figure. Who wouldn't admire it!"

Mrs. Bemis nudged her friend with her elbow. "Come, now! You and I are old pals. When the time comes, I know you'll tell me the whole sweet story!"

At that Mrs. Branstane graciously melted. Even laughed in a kittenish manner.

So the general mind was full of it, then! The logical linking of Judge Penning's name and her own! Mrs. Branstane even went so far as to ask her friend Mrs. Bemis to dinner on the following evening. . . .

On reaching home Mrs. Branstane received from Humphrietta the report of a telephone message to the effect that Mrs. and Miss Gayland would not be home for dinner but rather would stay with Mrs. Banks and Sylvia. And a moment later Humphrietta ministered yet more to the mood which, Mrs. Branstane thanked her good fortune, she was enabled to indulge alone.

After the delivery of her message Humphrietta was moved to appear once again at the library door, her tow hair tousled, her arms bared to the heat of the day, her hands folded across her stomach under the blue gingham of her apron, which she flapped noisily, in the hope of gaining the attention of a Mrs. Branstane who stubbornly stood at a front window, looking out of it in rapt meditation.

"Beats all how hot it is!" Humphrietta ventured into speech.

Taking the late August thermometer for what it was, the observation was not wanting in pith.

"Beats all how hot it do be!" she ventured again.

With the same indifferent result.

"Don't it!" she added, loud enough to compel a rejoinder.

"What do you want, Etta?" Mrs. Branstane, as usual, drove straight to the point.

At this concession Etta burst into the full tide of her long nursed narration.

"Why ma'am, it's just thissaway. It's jis' long enough, so it is, mum, that I've been a-slavin' here

and a-drudgin' away, gratin' the very skin off'n my hands, and blisterin' me knees all up till I can't bend 'em, hardly, so they keeps me awake o' nights so I can't sleep a wink, and me fetchin' and carryin' — carryin' the hull house on my shoulders, and gittin' no more'n two dollars a week for it all! And I ain't a-going' to stand it another minute, so I ain't, mum, so there! I gives you fair notice o' that, mum, all in due time. 'Tain't right, so it ain't. They ain't no sense to it, says I — me as 'as worked here hard enough for me seving dollars a week only, and git on'y two now, and have twic't as much to do for it — makin' beds and dustin' the hull house, and washin' and bakin', and even washin' the windies and scrubbin' the piazzies! The very idee of my a-doin' of all that lazy Barclay's work! Me a-doin' all my own work and his'n too! And gittin' only a fourt' o' what I got a year ago — with cookin' and bakin' besides! I says to the Weymouths's Jinny Buzzum a week ago, I says, 'I ain't a-goin' to do it no more!' I says. And Jinny says, 'You better bet I wouldn't do no sich a thing!' she says. She says, 'W'y, the hull town knows how poor them Gaylands is!' Jinny says. She says, 'W'y, I heard the missus say on'y yistiddy 'at them Gaylands is got to the end o' their string long ago, and hain't found it out yit!' And Jinny says her missus says, 'W'y, it's all nonsense, them Gaylands hangin' on there, jis' a-waitin' fer Judge Penning to come along and lift 'em out o' the hole, and keep the grass cut, and straighten up the gate-posts!' Jinny says her missus says. And she says — Jinny's missus, Mrs. Wentworth says — 'I don't believe Judge Penning is a-goin' to lift 'em out, anyway,' she says. 'He ain't goin' to marry that

pauper Annabel, in *my* opinion!’ Jinny says her missus says. And if Jinny’s missus says it, what you goin’ to say yourself, I want to know! And *I* says, right here and now, I says, where do *I* come in, if nobuddy’s goin’ to come along and lift us out of the hole, I says, mum! And me a-workin’ and slavin’ for two dollars a week, and no hopes of any more, mum! Not even from you yourself, mum! W’y, it ain’t sensible, that ’s wot it ain’t! Me a-workin’ for nawthink, mum! And so I comes to you, mum. Oh, mum, I ain’t never forgot the time five years ago, mum, when you come to me, mum, and put your arms about me waist, mum, and told me you was downhearted yerself, mum, and we was to be like sisters together, mum! I allus said you was the right sort, mum. Only you got higher up, and I didn’t. But I knowed you ’d understand how I feel, mum. And so it ’s come to just this, mum — either I knows where I’m at, or else you gets another cook, right away, mum! Beggin’ your pardon, o’ course!”

Etta’s lungs and her oration having given out simultaneously, Etta stopped at that point.

“Yes — yes. That will do, Etta,” Mrs. Branstane drawled. And as, with Etta behind her, it was safe to smile, Mrs. Branstane smiled at her own unconscious imitation of Judge Penning’s drawling mannerism. Smiled for other reasons also.

For if the town’s acceptance of the logic of Judge Penning’s joining his interests with her own had reached even the ears of this humble servant, was there reason in Mrs. Branstane’s doubting further?

“So that ’s the way they talk, is it, Etta?” Mrs. Branstane said, still facing defensively out the window.

"Yazzum, it is, mum. They says Mr. Penning's had the wool pulled over his eyes long enough, so he has, mum. And now he knows it himself, mum!"

"Hush! Not so loud, Etta! . . . How long have you been here?"

"Six year, mum. And me that faithful —"

"Yes — yes. . . . You were nineteen when you came?"

"Yazzum!"

"And very green? And for six years you have been the best cook in the first family of the town? And held your head high over all the other servants, just on that account?"

"Ya-yazzum."

"And I taught you all you know?"

Etta hung her head.

"Do — do you remember the silk dress I gave you — out of my own money? And the chiffon waist? . . . And do you remember how you have been favoured at every Christmas? When all the other servants of the town were not?"

Etta's head drooped lower.

"And do you remember how I saved you when you were caught wearing the underwear that Mrs. Gayland and Miss Annabel wore only one day, so as not to have it washed to pieces in the laundry — and you fished it out of the hamper and wore it all the rest of the week?"

Silence.

"And what if I tell you, Etta, that I — er — that I shall probably keep this house, and shall want a good cook, at good wages? . . . If you want me to keep you, when we get this house going again, in the grand old way, so that you can hold your head up

among all the other servants of the town, do you think it is becoming of you to come to me and complain in this way? Do you, Etta?"

"And so the old house is a-goin' on again, in the old way, mum?" Etta burst out in excitement. "And how is that, mum? Is somebody new a-comin' in?"

There Mrs. Branstane turned and smiled at her servant. "That will do, Etta," she said magnificently.

CHAPTER VII

WHETHER Mrs. Branstane felt such a thing as compunction at the end of Senator Banks is open to question. Perhaps she did, for a moment — for as long a time as Mrs. Branstane ever devoted herself to amiable emotions. Her philosophy began with the cardinal point that the beaten man in any fight has had at least the opportunity of defence. It was no one's concern but his own if he dropped.

All such matters, in any case, Mrs. Branstane was perfectly willing to leave to the professors of ethics. Her immediate fancies were stampeding her all in one direction. Etta's gossip she hurriedly took to her room, to ponder it.

Wasn't the whole town judging precisely as she had judged, and from the selfsame tokens?

And wasn't Etta the more trustworthy witness for the very reason that she was too stupid to colour her evidence with her own inventions?

Mrs. Branstane so agreed.

Dinnertime found her with her elbows still upon her faithful dressing-table, her hands clasped in ecstasy, arranging a dozen new schemes for a meeting with Penning, and wondering why she had stupidly kept Mrs. Bemis waiting till the morrow's dinner, to hear her whole sweet story. . . .

While, all unconscious of this, Judge Penning, along with Mrs. Gayland and Annabel and Sherry Brookes,

was at dinner with Mrs. Banks and Sylvia. Willing enough as Penning was to stay, they would never have heard of his being anywhere else. His voice alone had weight with the distraught Mrs. Banks, and it was his judgment that decided her to seek for a space the home of a sister in the country. Annabel, he also decided, was to help Sylvia take her there in the morning, and stay by for a week of rest. Mrs. Gayland herself, not to be outdone in sorrow, was to leave on one of her visits to her still ailing husband.

In the morning Penning kept them company on their train, and journeyed on for a few days of business in New York, with intentions of return, by arrangement with Sherry, in time to meet the two home-coming girls together.

The plan held true, and a week later, in the early evening, they four walked away from the railway station toward the Gayland house, where Sylvia was now to stay for a while with her inseparable. And though it was but a week after his somewhat stony drive with Annabel, it seemed to Penning a year had elapsed instead. For a space they walked slowly and in silence together, along St. Mark's Place, past the empty Banks house, toward the Avenue. Never had the town seemed so populous and gay. But to the things of earth they paid small heed just then — none even to the blinds drawn down upon the Senator's failing endeavours. One matter only concerned them. They two were together again. And when the hurrying throng from the train, and along with it Sherry and Sylvia, had gone on ahead, they turned to each other suddenly, with the same thought upon their lips.

Except that one said, "Can," and the other said,

"Will you forgive me!" And then they walked on, while Penning took her hand in his arm, and with his arm pressed it to his side.

But at the corner of the Avenue, where the Gayland house came into view, Annabel halted abruptly again, so that they were obliged to laugh at the manner of Penning's being swung round to face her. The occasion had presented itself for Annabel to say a painful something, premeditated for days.

"Oh!" she frowned in a mock dismay. "I've just thought! What are we going to do for a chaperone!"

Penning studied for a moment, and then put on a wry face to answer, "Well! We always have the faithful —"

"No!" Annabel looked up at him, rather proud of herself at that moment. "Because she is to go."

Penning stared down at her speechless. "Then you —"

"I've learned." She bobbed her head up and down. "Too late. But I've learned. And she's to go." And again Penning was swung, by the suddenness and determination of Annabel's move forward.

"Yes!" she said. "She's going, if it's got to be in a coffin! . . . Only" — he felt her shiver — "it's going to be a nasty half hour! Isn't it!"

"Leave it to me, now!" he snapped.

A yard or two farther on another thought rather clogged Annabel's footsteps. "Really" — her step faltered — "I'm — I'm sorry for the woman."

"Yes," Penning cheerfully assented, "she'll make a lovely corpse."

"No! It's only that I'm sorry for myself. Come on, Pen!" and she hurried him along. "Oh, I'm

slow. But you can't keep it from me for ever that 2 and 2 make 4!" . . .

A last thin rim of the sun seemed poised upon the asphalt only a mile or two up the Avenue, as if purposely lingering to throw an approving glow upon them. As they turned into the vine-wreathed gate to the Gayland park another show greeted them. For in the distance they beheld the lately deserted scene of a little tea party which Mrs. Branstane had hastily organised for a bit of heartening banter on the score of her sentimental prospects. Something of an occasion she must have made of it, for later they found the cards of Mrs. Brantley, and Mrs. Bemis, and others.

By the side of the fountain, which partly concealed them, half way up the walk from the gateway, Annabel and Penning were halted, dumbfounded at the air of proprietorship that hovered over the dainty new table set out on the lawn in front of the house beneath the trees, still lightly burdened with newly emptied cups and plates of muffins and cheese.

Mrs. Branstane, however, had seen them.

Perhaps she had taken hasty warning from the more sudden entrance of Sherry and Sylvia on the grounds, though their instant meandering aside among the roses, in their own absorption, left her nonplussed. But her eye, travelling down the Avenue, in quest of an explanation, had returned her a shock at the sight of Annabel, and she had hurriedly dismissed, through a side gate, the last of her guests, in prudent preparation for any awkward situation.

As Penning and Annabel came up the path from the fountain, Mrs. Branstane was pale as a ghost, and quivered in every joint, when at last their figures rose

on the steps. At once she tried to speak, but for an instant her tongue lay like a dead thing in her mouth, and the words, when they came, were barely intelligible for the quaver in her voice.

"Oh! *Hel-lo!*" she meant to say, in an offhand manner as if their coming were unexpected, but otherwise of no moment. "I didn't think you'd get back so soon. Won't Mr. Brookes and Sylvia come in?"

"They probably will," said Penning. And it was he that gave Mrs. Branstane the veritable shock.

He brushed past her through the door and tossed his broad-brimmed straw on the great oaken settle with his own air of proprietorship. Perhaps he laid it on a bit, in order to conceal a preliminary tremor of his own.

With that token Mrs. Branstane was instantly at a terrible tension. Not that she was truly frightened. Only puzzled, taken unawares.

"Do make yourself at home," she said to Penning, needlessly enough. And to Annabel, "Let me take your hat, my dear. You must be terribly tired."

It cost Annabel an effort, but she ignored the attention and laid her hat for herself on the broad table by the stairway and said, a bit nervously, "Yes, I am a bit tired. But it doesn't much matter."

"It must have been trying," Mrs. Branstane struggled on. "You left Mrs. Banks well, I hope?"

She spoke that more firmly. It gratified Mrs. Branstane to note that she was growing a bit angry. And so was becoming herself. Even to be thrown thus at a disadvantage, to be thus taken by surprise, was enough to anger her at once.

"So far, Judge Penning, I haven't had the oppor-

tunity of offering you my sympathy on the loss of your friend." Since Annabel meant to be frigid Mrs. Branstane would utter her challenge to Penning. "It must have been a heavy blow."

"It was," said Penning, so carelessly that the words escaped his lips almost without intention. Some others, with a real intention behind them, he directed to Annabel. They were even fervent. "I hope there's something in the house to eat!"

"You shall have it in a moment!" Mrs. Branstane interrupted. "Aren't Mr. Brookes and Sylvia coming in to join us?" She turned toward the door to call them. "You know," she finished, before the summons to the outsiders, "I've never really met Mr. Brookes formally, it happens. I'm waiting for you to present him."

Annabel looked helplessly to Penning. And cheerfully now he spoke for her. "I see no necessity for that."

"Oh!" Mrs. Branstane delayed her signal to the loitering twain in the park. "Aren't they really going to stay?"

"Oh, yes! *They* 'll stay."

The shaking Annabel was obliged to admire the daring of Penning, as he openly courted the issue with his insulting accent.

Mrs. Branstane on her own part tried to make her stare at him the gaze of mystification. "I — I don't believe I understand."

And Penning coolly stared back, and left her to draw what inference she might from the glance which was all he returned.

It was all maddeningly difficult to Mrs. Branstane. If they meant fight, she wanted them to blaze with it

at once. This suspense was wearing. She had swung fully round upon them, with her back to the open door, and before her they stood, having unconsciously moved side by side, with their faces lighted in the lingering glow from without, and bearing what meaning Mrs. Branstane could no longer mistake. . . .

It must be that a man who is caught, in the water, or in a fire, or by onrushing wheels, so that he must die, and there is no escape whatever, will see, in one supreme and final instant, in a single embracing vision, all that he had, and all that he wanted, and all that he planned, pass from him.

Something of this happened that moment to Mrs. Branstane. Before this blast of reality the frail and flickering blaze of her foolish illusions vanished like a light. And for all she tried to stay it. Before she could catch herself she had taken a step toward Penning, with her arms instinctively outstretched, and all that was lost within her cried out to him,

"Why — ! Don't — don't you *like* me?"

Then, in a flash, and with a flare of her eye, all her genius for mischief returned, and she amended the words,

"Don't you love me any more?"

A glance from one to the other of their flushed but stony faces convinced her that the device had failed.

And again Mrs. Branstane went white as a sheet. Almost her knees gave way under her, at this first sensation of a failure in her life that was utter and final. From one face to the other, and back again, her eye travelled. And then, suddenly, she knew only that she was furious, and free, and at home.

"Aha-a-a!" came the old cry, in the old way, bringing a start to Annabel. "I see it now!"

She had rushed up to Penning and stood before him, her hands clenched at her side and her whole form trembling. The next words choked her, and something that was still ineradicably woman in her half raised her hands as if to cover her face. An instant she faltered so, and then sank to the floor beside a chair that caught one of her arms and let it rest there. For the eternity of half a minute Mrs. Branstane rocked there, slightly, in the grip of uncontrollable emotion, while Penning and Annabel backed somewhat away.

It was going to be even worse than they had imagined.

Penning tried to speak, to have done with it. His trembling lips were framing a few helpful words, — “Mrs. Branstane, I beg of you, let us have no —”

But like a wild thing Mrs. Branstane leaped to her feet, the more enraged to have been caught, even for an instant, in weakness. Her eyes blazed. A hot flush had supplanted the pallor of a minute before. She was thinking now with lightning speed. It was not refusal of thought, but abundance of thought, that clogged her tongue. Penning was as much taken back, as wondering and helpless, as Annabel, with Mrs. Branstane creeping toward him as if she meant to spring. The mingled fright and fury on her face were not precisely lovely.

“You coward! You whelp!” she began in a low voice that quivered with passion. “So! You are ashamed of me, are you? In secret, behind locked doors, you are willing to listen to my flattery, eh? Lick it up and cry for more, wouldn’t you! But in public I’m — I’m a servant still, eh? My God!” Her clenched fists reached out to him. “Now, now

you think you are safe enough — have backing enough — and so you 'll throw me out, eh? Well, it's cowardly persecution, that's what it is! You've fooled me. You've poisoned Annabel against me. Even Annabel. The only hold I had in the world. The only one that tried to make me happy. And you've poisoned her. I've seen you try to do it. You thief! You've robbed me. You've always persecuted me. You've always tried to crowd me out!"

"Poor woman! Poor woman!" Penning was saying, idly, wishing for some way of ending it. He held up a hand to stay her.

But with that gesture Mrs. Branstane rather stayed Penning, in the old way. Rising to her full height, and with her head flung back, she said, in a scorn that forbade or defied interruption, "Don't 'poor woman' me, if you please! I won't have that from you! You're not fit to frame the words." And she laughed at his instant wilting into modesty.

That was too sweet. It rocked her from her sudden moral height into the more familiar manner. "Dirt that you are! For you to talk down to me! As if the whole town hadn't learned by now what your 'brilliance' amounts to! Your wonderful talents — where are they!"

Mrs. Branstane was hurling out the words in a volley, to hold her enemies and gain time till she could think her way along and perhaps be extricated. And now the ideas began to come. All restraint passed from her. Turning for a moment to Annabel, she said,

"I'm glad you're here, my girl. You two couldn't have planned it better. The doves!" She even swung

about and beckoned in the other two who had come to the doorway in amazement at the uproar. "Come in, you two. This is something for you. I'm going to show this man up at last. Yes!" — turning back to Penning — "did you catch that? I'm going to show you up."

And for answer Penning smiled to Annabel with a swift new thought. It flashed upon him that perhaps the best explanation of himself might come from these very lips.

"To think!" Mrs. Branstane looked hungrily through him. "That I might have showed you up long ago! When I might have done it right and proper! With *everybody* by to listen! And not just these silly young fools. What a chance I missed! Why didn't I do it? Why, you ingrate? I'll tell you why. Because while you were hating me, and scheming your worst to beat me down, and driving me half crazy with your persecution, I was praising you. Praising you here, praising you there, everywhere, and doing my utmost to save your reputation. Ask Mrs. Bemis. Ask Mrs. Brantley. When all the while you were paining me. When I might have snuffed you out with a word. Why didn't I do it! Well, here's why again! Because I would have been your servant, willingly. I *was* your servant. And you never knew it. There was nothing I wouldn't have done for you — worked the very skin off my hands for you. I was ready to be your slave. But what did *you* care about that! What do you care now! Coward! Rat! When a single word from me would have brought you to your knees to me, begging for mercy! Coward! I could shoot you dead with that word! Ingrate! I might swim the Atlantic

ocean, to save your life, and I'd be lucky to get a 'Thank you' on the other shore, for all my pains! You leper! You've ruined my life. And that's all you care!"

And Mrs. Branstane snapped her fingers before his face, to signify how very little he cared.

So handsomely did Penning look his distress for her that she almost spared him the bolt that she panted to heave at him. But she heaved it.

"We-ell!" She turned grandly to Annabel. "Here's — where — he — pays! Here's where I show him up at last. I tell you I speak my word. If I'm to come down in the world, he comes down too. Listen to me, if you please. All the time this grand Judge here was sitting in honour, passing on law-suits, the honourable Judge, the upright Judge, he was — bribing. Bribing a woman! Paying her money to hold her tongue. *That's* the kind of Judge we've had. *That's* why his cheeks thinned out. *That's* why he failed in his work. The sneak in him was fretting him to death, that's what! Aha-a-a, Annabel! That makes you open your eyes, doesn't it! *That's* the sort of man you've been worshipping all the time! Allow me to present the *real*" — ineffably Mrs. Branstane drawled the word, and bowed low as she said it — "allow me to present the *re-al* Judge Penning! You can't believe it, can you? Well! I guess I know. For *I* was — the woman!"

In a strident note of scorn Mrs. Branstane laughed, and struck an attitude, utterly careless now of what she said and did, even against herself.

"Good God, girl, how I have laughed at you! At everybody that wondered what could be the matter with this fine fellow! When all the while *I* knew well

enough what ailed him! *And* — do you know *why* he paid me money? O-oh, he had to do it. I had him in the hollow of my hand.”

The dominant element now was self-adoration. And so she sailed on.

“Yes, my dear girl! *I* made the little fellow pay, you’d better bet! That br-rilliant intellect was at my mercy all the while. *I* made him grovel! Lord, how he hopped when I laid on the lash!”

Here Mrs. Branstane threw back her head and laughed, at the vision of physical retribution she had called up for Penning. “Nice and proper he paid his little money! And only guess what for! The perfect idiot! Listen to this! He paid his good money to keep me from blabbing pretty secrets of an utter enemy of his! Think of that! And do you know who the enemy was, Annabel?”

Penning started toward her. But before he could prevent it she had uttered the rest. “Old Gayland! Yes! Your father, my dear girl! Your saintly father! Did you ever hear of the like! Oh, he *was* easy! Just to keep your dear old Daddy’s dirty secrets from you, he paid me! Rawther a funny arrangement, wasn’t it, eh?”

From that point Annabel scarcely heard more. Pained to the uttermost, she was smiling through her pain. In this vengeful portrait Penning was not merely reconstructed, she saw him with new cubits to his stature.

Something of this broadening comprehension Mrs. Branstane saw spreading over the girl’s face, widening her eyes, and gladdening them. With that the woman began to realise how completely she had given her own case away.

"Oh, you needn't chortle, you empty-headed little fool!" she snapped, and walked toward Annabel till their faces almost touched. "He *had* to do it. And so would you have had to do it, if I had said so. . . . But it *was* rawther a funny arrangement, wasn't it? *He* paying me good money to save *you* from knowing your father!" There she grasped Annabel's wrist fiercely, and ground out between her teeth, "That's what he did for you, you little fool — while you were thinking ill of him because of it! Get down on your knees to that man!"

Mrs. Branstane would have forced the girl into precisely that posture but for Penning's step to interfere.

"You little twittering canary!" the woman contented herself with saying instead. "What have *you* got, that's up to that man's mark! You told me yourself, one day, that you thought he was a failure. Now you *know* why he was a failure! Because of you, that's why! He gave up nearly all he had on your account — reputation, and all the rest of it. And do you really want to know *why* he did all that? — *why* he was willing to do anything not to have me tell —"

Again Penning made a dash toward her, but Mrs. Branstane caught his hand and stayed it long enough to blurt the rest.

"Because your Daddy and I — He didn't want you to know —"

There Annabel was more effective in choking off the unhappy torrent.

"I know everything, Mrs. Branstane," she prevaricated, beautifully. The girl had been guessing shrewdly in the last few minutes.

"You know nothing! Down on your knees to that man!" Mrs. Branstane fairly shouted it. "Down on your knees! That's where you belong! That's where *I* have been all along!"

Tears of impotent rage, of eternal loss, filled Mrs. Branstane's eyes. She turned to Penning.

"And I wronged him. Bullied him. Ruined him. Or tried to. And all the time *I* could see what he was! I, the one he hated! While *you*" — she swayed back to Annabel — "*you*, the one he did all that for, thought he was a failure!" She laughed aloud. "Why! You never knew what he was. I lied just now. I said he paid me bribe money. He did pay me money. Yes, but it was only to pay me back for the bills on this house. I called it bribe money whenever I wanted to threaten him. Whenever I wanted him in my hands. Wanted *him*. But it's a lie. He's grand, that's what he is. And all for that rotten father of yours."

Still again Penning sought to stop her, but she backed away from him, and spouted on.

"*That's* why I made him jump. Because he wouldn't — wouldn't like me."

At last the words were out. And sincerely. So utterly clear that Mrs. Branstane had to blush for herself furiously. For a moment she was a woman, and she started to rush away.

"Oh," they heard her say to herself. "It's good bye to everything now!"

To her surprise she saw Penning stepping toward her politely. His face too was flushed. With embarrassment. With a blaze of comprehension. With a tinge of amusement. And of pity.

And he caught her hand, and bowed over it. "I — I never understood," he said. "I'm — I'm sorry!"

Mrs. Branstane watched the procedure in a sort of hypnotic fascination. She even held up her hand and gazed at it.

Then, including all the four of them who had witnessed this occasion, in a lingering and parting glance at each — perhaps pleased with the sincere evidences of sympathy that she marked in their faces — Mrs. Branstane, slowly now, as in a dream, passed up the stair and to her room.

The next day she gathered together her belongings and took up lodgings at a remote boarding establishment on the edge of the town.

A week afterward, they learned, Mrs. Branstane had left Rossacre, to go on with existence elsewhere.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT evening later, when they had recovered some calm of mind, and Etta had stayed the united ravennings of their appetites, these four made a quiet festival of the welcome darkness. To draw the more quickly away from a tumultuous recollection, they crossed the river and climbed the mountain path, to the height where the benches were. A brisk breeze had arisen, perhaps to justify their cleaving the closer together. But was it the crisp air, and circumstance and fancy only, which made the great little town beneath them, sparkling like a mammoth jewel with its thousand diamond lights, seem to have been purged of something noisome?

On the distant Avenue they could hear for a while the lazy hum of traffic. Then slowly the louder rumours of the night died down, and gave their mood the emphasis of solitude and silence. Only the shivering leaves of early Autumn rustled in reminiscence of the nearly ended summer. Crickets chattered in corroboration. All the quieter instruments of night tuned their pipes and played their soft late-summer symphony — the outward orchestration of an inward harmony in these four.

Once, under cover of the darkness, Annabel laid her head against Penning's shoulder, and said to him, "You do feel sorry for her, don't you?"

For answer he kissed her hair. And she went on, "But to think what a stubborn child I was! And

how patient you were with me! . . . But really, she *was* good to us, for a time." For a while she kept silence, and then, — "Do you know what I'm thinking? Of how pleasant it's going to be when you once start talking! It must have taught you something wonderful. Hasn't it?" He could feel, if not see, her lifting an eager face.

"I think," he answered, "it's shown me the truly important thing. That's finding — before it's too late — the few people, or the one person, one can cling to. . . . Cling to," he repeated. "And then being that sort of person oneself."

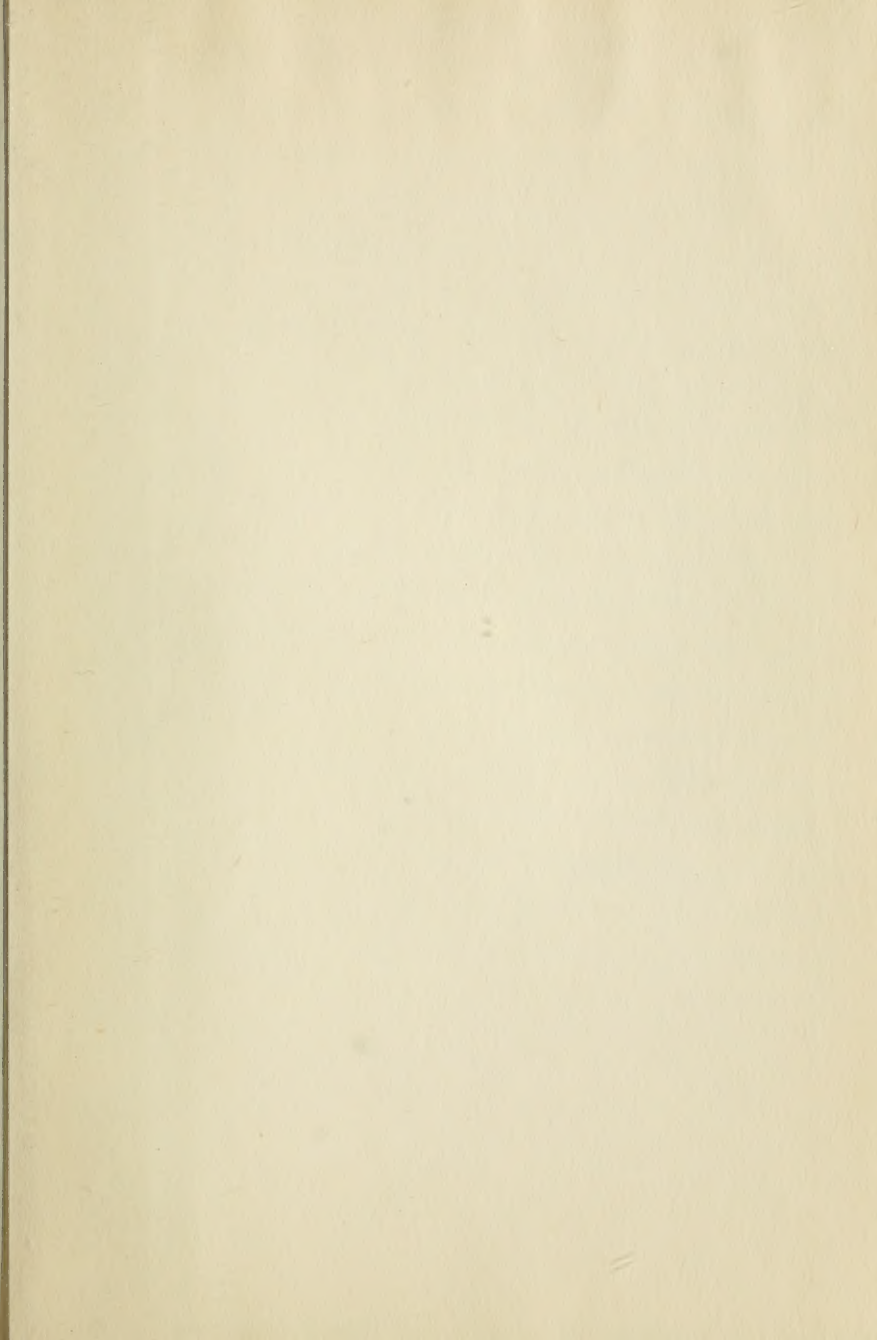
He drew her to him.

On another bench near by, business of this character, if not in the same key, was going forward.

And so, two and two, these four pieced together, into exquisite jointure again, the tattered ends of their long and absurd divisions.

THE END





933337

